

AVON

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# Fantasy

READER No.9

## THE FLOWER-WOMEN by Clarke Ashton Smith

also stories by

P. Schuyler Miller

Otis Adelbert Kline

Fritz Leiber, Jr.

AND OTHERS





# FANTASY

## *At Its Best*

Imagination is both the spice of life and the stuff from which reality is made. It carries us away from the humdrum world of worries into fascinating, and sometimes delightfully fearful worlds not visible to our five senses. Yet the stuff from which these dreams are made contributed to the making of the world we all live in. The telephone, the radio, the automobile, were all merely fantasies less than a hundred years ago. No wonder then that such stories as the AVON FANTASY READER publishes have a special thrill not to be found in other types of literature. For in these dreams may be hints of things to come, things that may have been, or things that may be even now among us. Consider some of the stories in this number:

**THE MAN FROM THE MOON** by Otis Adelbert Kline: a story of an interplanetary war, of a struggle to the death between two of Earth's neighbors, and a hint of a celestial people who may walk among us today.

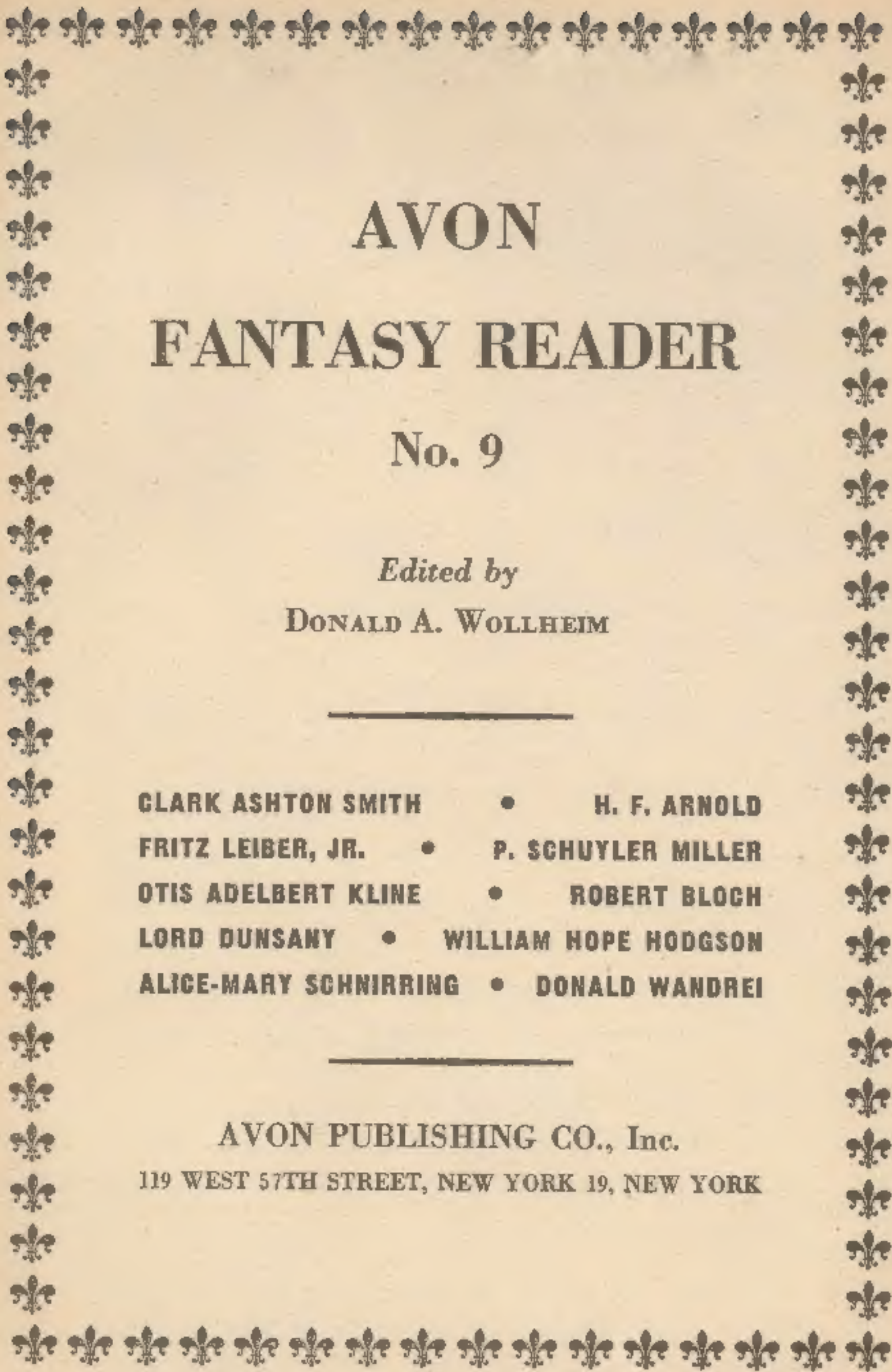
**THE FLOWER-WOMEN** by Clark Ashton Smith: a colorful fantasia of life on a far-off star, a tale of exotic vampiric flowers with the appearance and wiles of beautiful wanton women.

**THROUGH THE VIBRATIONS** by P. Schuyler Miller: where is Atlantis, that vanished home of the world's first civilization? In this story, reminiscent of the imagery of A. Merritt, the veil of time is pierced to unravel the most intriguing of ancient mysteries.

There's also Fritz Leiber, Jr.'s strangest story, **THE MAN WHO NEVER GREW YOUNG**; that classic tale of midnight doom, **THE NIGHT WIRE**, by H. F. Arnold; and many more specially selected stories of weird-fiction and science-fiction by the best writers of the field. The ninth AVON FANTASY READER is a particularly outstanding number of this highly acclaimed series.

—D.A.W.





# AVON

## FANTASY READER

No. 9

*Edited by*  
DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

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CLARK ASHTON SMITH	•	H. F. ARNOLD
FRITZ LEIBER, JR.	•	P. SCHUYLER MILLER
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AVON PUBLISHING CO., Inc.  
119 WEST 57TH STREET, NEW YORK 19, NEW YORK



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# *The Flower-Women*

*by Clark Ashton Smith*

*Clark Ashton Smith, recluse, sculptor, poet and master fantasist, lives, we are told, as a hermit in a remote mountainous area of California. In the silent, night-bound fastness of his home, the stars shine down with a brilliance and number that have made the region a favorite site of astronomers. It is not to be wondered that the very sensitive mind of the man whom the late H. P. Lovecraft liked to refer to as "Klarkash-Ton, the Atlantean philosopher," must often reflect in poetic reverie on the eerie and colorful life that fills the myriad worlds of the universe. We may never know the secrets of the millionfold planets that girdle the stars, yet through such tales as "The Flower-Women" we manage to create for ourselves a glimpse of these manifold wonders.*

A

THLÉ," said Maal Dweb, "I suffer from the frightful curse of omnipotence. In all Xiccarph, and in the five outer planets of the triple suns, there is no one, there is nothing, to dispute my dominion. Therefore my ennui has become intolerable."

The girlish eyes of Athlé regarded the enchanter with a gaze of undying astonishment, which, however, was not due to his strange avowal. She was the last of the fifty-one women that Maal Dweb had turned into statues in order to preserve their frail, corruptible beauty from the worm-like gnawing of time. Since, through a laudable desire to avoid monotony, he had resolved never to repeat again this particular sorcery, the magician had cherished Athlé with the affection which an artist feels for the final masterpiece of a series. He had placed her on a little dais, beside the ivory chair in his chamber of meditation. Often he addressed to her his queries or monologues; and the fact that she did not reply or even hear was to him a signal and unfailing recommendation.

"There is but one remedy for this boredom of mine," he went on—"the abnegation, at least for a while, of that all too certain power from which it springs. Therefore, I, Maal Dweb, the ruler of six worlds and all their moons, shall go forth alone, unheralded, and without other equipment than that which any fledgling sorcerer might possess. In this way, perhaps I shall recover the lost charm of incertitude, the foregone enchantment of peril. Adventures that I



have not foreseen will be mine, and the future will wear the alluring veil of the mysterious. It remains, however, to select the field of my adventurings."

Maal Dweb arose from his curiously carved chair and waved back the four automatons of iron, having the likeness of armed men, that sprang to attend him. He passed along the halls of his palace, where painted hangings told in vermillion and purple the dread legends of his power. Through ebony valves that opened noiselessly at the uttering of a high-pitched word, he entered the chamber in which was his planetarium.

The room was walled, floored and vaulted with a dark crystal, full of tiny, numberless fires, that gave the illusion of unbounded space with all its stars. In mid air, without chains or other palpable support, there hung an array of various globes that represented the three suns, the six planets and thirteen moons of the system ruled by Maal Dweb. The miniature suns, amber, emerald and carmine, bathed their intricately circling worlds with an illumination that reproduced at all times the diurnal conditions of the system itself; and the pigmy satellites maintained always their corresponding orbits and relative positions.

The sorcerer went forward, walking as if on some unfathomable gulf of night, with stars and galaxies beneath him. The poising worlds were level with his shoulders as he passed among them. Disregarding the globes that corresponded to Mornoth, Xiccarph, Ulassa, Noup and Rhul, he came to Votalp, the outermost, which was then in aphelion on the farther side of the room.

Votalp, a large and moonless world, revolved imperceptibly as he studied it. For one hemisphere, he saw, the yellow sun was at that time in total eclipse behind the sun of carmine; but in spite of this, and its greater distance from the solar triad, Votalp was lit with sufficient clearness. It was mottled with strange hues like a great cloudy opal; and the mottlings were microcosmic oceans, isles, mountains, jungles and deserts. Fantastic sceneries leapt into momentary salience, taking on the definitude and perspective of actual landscapes, and then faded back amid the iridescent blur. Glimpses of teeming, multifarious life, incredible tableaux, monstrous happenings, were beheld by Maal Dweb as he looked down like some celestial spy.

It seemed, however, that he found little to divert or inveigle him in these outré doings and exotic wonders. Vision after vision rose before him, summoned and dismissed at will, as if he were turning the pages of a familiar volume. The wars of gigantic wyverns, the matings of half-vegetable monsters, the queer algæ that had filled a certain ocean with their living and moving labyrinths, the remarkable spawn of certain polar glaciers: all these elicited no gleam or sparkle in his dulled eyes of blackish emerald.

At length, on that portion of the planet which was turning slowly into the double dawn from its moonless night, he perceived an occurrence that drew and held his attention. For the first time, he began to calculate the precise latitude and longitude of the surrounding milieu.

"There," he said to himself, "is a situation not without interest. In fact, the



whole affair is quaint and curious enough to warrant my intervention. I shall visit Votalp."

He withdrew from the planetarium and made a few preparations for his meditated journey. Having changed his robe of magisterial sable and scarlet for a hodden mantle, and having removed from his person every charm and talisman, with the exception of two phylacteries acquired during his novitiate, he went forth into the garden of his mountain-built palace. He left no instructions with the many retainers who served him: for these retainers were automatons of iron and brass, who would fulfill their various duties without injunction till he returned.

Traversing the curious labyrinth which he alone could solve, he came to the verge of the sheer mesa, where python-like lianas drooped into space, and metallic palms deployed their armaments of foliage against the far-flung horizons of the world Xiccarph. Empires and cities, lying supine beneath his magical dominion, were unrolled before him; but, giving them hardly a glance, he walked along the estrade of black marble at the very brink, till he reached a narrow promontory around which there hung at all times a deep and hueless cloud, obscuring the prospect of the lands below and beyond.

The secret of this cloud, affording access to multiple dimensions and deeply folded realms of space conterminous with far worlds, was known only to Maal Dweb. He had built a silver drawbridge on the promontory; and by lowering its airy span into the cloud, he could pass at will to the farther zones of Xiccarph, or could cross the very void between the planets.

Now, after making certain highly recondite calculations, he manipulated the machinery of the light drawbridge so that its other end would fall upon the particular terrain that he desired to visit in Votalp. Then, assuring himself that his calculations and adjustments were flawless, he followed the silver span into the dim, bewildering chaos of the cloud. Here, as he groped in a gray blindness, it seemed that his body and members were drawn out over infinite gulfs, and were bent through impossible angles. A single misstep would have plunged him into spatial regions from which all his cunning sorcery could have contrived no manner of return or release; but he had often trod these hidden ways, and he did not lose his equilibrium. The transit appeared to involve whole centuries of time; but finally he emerged from the cloud and came to the farther end of the drawbridge.

Before him was the scene that had lured his interest in Votalp. It was a semi-tropic valley, level and open in the foreground, and rising steeply at the other extreme, with all its multiform fantasies of vegetation, toward the cliffs and chasms of sable mountains horned with blood-red stone. The time was still early dawn; but the amber sun, freeing itself slowly from the occultation of the sun of carmine, had begun to lighten the hues and shadows of the valley with strange copper and orange. The emerald sun was still below the horizon.

The terminus of the bridge had fallen on a mossy knoll, behind which the hueless cloud had gathered, even as about the promontory in Xiccarph. Maal



Dweb descended the knoll, feeling no concern whatever for the bridge. It would remain as he had left it, till the time of his return; and if, in the interim, any creatures from Votalp should cross the gulf and invade his mountain citadel, they would meet a fearful doom in the snares and windings of the labyrinth; or, failing this, would be exterminated by his iron servitors.

As he went down the knoll into the valley, the enchanter heard an eerie, plaintive singing, like that of sirens who bewail some irremediable misfortune. The singing came from a sisterhood of unusual creatures, half woman and half flower, that grew in the valley bottom beside a sleepy stream of purple water. There were several scores of these lovely and charming monsters, whose feminine bodies of pink and pearl reclined amid the vermilion velvet couches of billowing petals to which they were attached. These petals were borne on mattress-like leaves and heavy, short, well-rooted stems. The flowers were disposed in irregular circles, clustering thickly toward the center, and with open intervals in the outer rows.

Maal Dweb approached the flower-women with a certain caution; for he knew that they were vampires. Their arms ended in long tendrils, pale as ivory, swifter and more supple than the coils of darting serpents, with which they were wont to secure the unwary victims drawn by their singing. Of course, knowing in his wisdom the inexorable laws of nature, he felt no disapproval of such vampirism; but, on the other hand, he did not care to be its object.

He circled about the strange family at a little distance, his movements hidden from their observation by boulders overgrown with tall, luxuriant lichens of red and yellow. Soon he neared the straggling outer line of plants that were upstream from the knoll on which he had landed; and here, in confirmation of the vision beheld on the mimic world in his planetarium, he found that the turf was upheaved and broken where five of the blossoms, growing apart from their companions, had been disrooted and removed bodily. He had seen in his vision the rape of the fifth flower, and he knew that the others were now lamenting her.

Suddenly, as if they had forgotten their sorrow, the wailing of the flower-women turned to a wild and sweet and voluptuous singing, like that of the Lorelei. By this token, the enchanter knew that his presence had been detected. Inured though he was to such bewitchments, he found himself far from insensible to the perilous luring of the voices. Contrary to his intention, forgetful of the danger, he emerged from the lee of the lichen-crested rocks. By insidious degrees, the melody fired his blood with a strange intoxication, it sang in his brain like some bewildering wine. Step by step, with a temporary loss of prudence for which, later, he was quite unable to account, he approached the blossoms.

Now, pausing at an interval that he deemed safe in his bemusement, he beheld plainly the half-human features of the vampires, leaning toward him with fantastic invitation. Their weirdly slanted eyes, like oblong opals of dew and venom, the snaky coiling of their bronze-green hair, the bright, baneful



scarlet of their lips, that thirsted subtly even as they sang, awoke within him the knowledge of his peril. Too late, he sought to defy the captiously woven spell. Unwinding with a movement swift as light, the long pale tendrils of one of the creatures wrapped him round, and he was drawn, resisting vainly, toward her couch.

At the moment of his capture, the whole sisterhood had ceased their singing. They began to utter little cries of triumph, shrill and sibilant. Murmurs of expectation, like the purrings of hungry flame, arose from the nearest, who hoped to share in the good fortune of the sorcerer's captress.

Maal Dweb, however, was now able to utilize his faculties. Without alarm or fear, he contemplated the lovely monster, who had drawn him to the verge of her velvet bed, and was fawning upon him with sinisterly parted lips.

Using a somewhat primary power of divination, he apprised himself of certain matters concerning the vampire. Having learnt the true, occult name which this creature shared with all others of her kind, he then spoke the name aloud in a firm but gentle tone; and winning thus, by an elemental law of magic, the power of mastery over his captress and her sisters, he felt the instant relaxation of the tendrils. The flower-woman, with fear and wonder in her strange eyes, drew back like a startled lamia; but Maal Dweb, employing the half-articulate sounds of her own language, began to soothe and reassure her. In a little while he was on friendly terms with the whole sisterhood. These simple and naïve beings forgot their vampiric intentions, their surprise and wonderment, and seemed to accept the magician very much as they accepted the three suns and the meteoric conditions of the planet Votalp.

Conversing with them, he soon verified the information obtained through the mimic globe. As a rule their emotions and memories were short-lived, their nature being closer to that of plants or animals than of humankind; but the loss of five sisters, occurring on successive mornings, had filled them with grief and terror that they could not forget. The missing flowers had been carried away bodily. The depredators were certain reptilian beings, colossal in size and winged like pterodactyls, who came down from their new-built citadel among the mountains at the valley's upper extreme. These beings, known as the Ispazars, seven in number, had become formidable sorcerers and had developed an intellection beyond that of their kind, together with many esoteric faculties. Preserving the cold and evilly cryptic nature of reptiles, they had made themselves the masters of an abhuman science. But, until the present, Maal Dweb had ignored them and had not thought it worth while to interfere with their evolution.

Now, through an errant whim, in his search for adventure, he had decided to pit himself against the Ispazars, employing no other weapons of sorcery than his own wit and will, his remembered learning, his clairvoyance, and the two simple amulets that he wore on his person.

"Be comforted," he said to the flower-women, "for verily I shall deal with these miscreants in a fitting manner."

At this, they broke into a shrill babble, repeating tales that the bird-people



of the valley had told them regarding the fortress of the Ispazars, whose walls rose sheerly from a hidden peak unscaled by man, and were void of portal or window save in the highmost ramparts, where the flying reptiles went in and out. And they told him other tales, concerning the ferocity and cruelty of the Ispazars. . . .

Smiling as if at the chatter of children, he diverted their thoughts to other matters, and told them many stories of odd and curious marvels, and queer happenings in alien worlds. In the meanwhile he perfected his plan for obtaining entrance to the citadel of the reptilian wizards.

The day went by in such divertisements; and one by one the three suns of the system fell beyond the valley's rim. The flower-women grew inattentive, they began to nod and drowse in the richly darkening twilight; and Maal Dweb proceeded with certain preparations that formed an essential part of his scheme.

Through his power of second-sight, he had determined the identity of the victim whom the reptiles would carry away in their next raid on the morrow. This creature, as it happened, was the one who had sought to ensnare him. Like the others, she was now preparing to fold herself for the night in her voluminous couch of petals. Confiding part of his plan to her, Maal Dweb manipulated in a singular fashion one of the amulets which he wore, and by virtue of this manipulation, reduced himself to the proportions of a pigmy. In this state, with the assistance of the drowsy siren, he was able to conceal himself in a hollow space among the petals; and thus embowered, like a bee in a rose he slept securely through the short, moonless night of Votalp.

The dawn awakened him, glowing as if through lucent curtains of ruby and purple. He heard the flower-women murmuring sleepily to one another as they opened their blossoms to the early suns. Their murmurs, however, soon changed into shrill cries of agitation and fear; and above the cries, there came a vibrant drumming as of great dragon-wings. He peered from his hiding-place and saw in the double dawn the descent of the Ispazars, from whose webbed vans a darkness fell on the valley. Nearer they drew, and he saw their cold and scarlet eyes beneath scaly brows, their long, undulant bodies, their lizard limbs and prehensile claws; and he heard the deep, articulate hissing of their voices. Then the petals closed about him blindly, shuddering and constrictive, as the flower-woman recoiled from the swooping monsters. All was confusion, terror, tumult; but he knew, from his observation of the previous rape, that two of the Ispazars had encircled the flower's stem with their python-like tails, and were pulling it from the ground as a human sorcerer might pull a mandrake plant.

He felt the convulsive agony of the disrooted blossom, he heard the lamentable shrieking of her sisters. Then there came a heavier beating of the drum-loud wings, and the feeling of giddy ascension and flight.

Through all this, Maal Dweb maintained the utmost presence of mind; and he did not betray himself to the Ispazars. After many minutes, there was a slackening of the headlong flight, and he knew that the reptiles were nearing



their citadel. A moment more, and the ruddy gloom of the shut petals darkened and purpled about him, as if they had passed from the sunlight into a place of deep shadow. The thrumming of wings ceased abruptly, the living flower was dropped from a height on some hard surface and Maal Dweb was nearly hurled from his hiding place by the violence of her fall. Moaning faintly, twitching a little, she lay where her captors had flung her. The enchanter heard the hissing voices of the reptile wizards, the rough, sharp sattering of their tails on a stone floor, as they withdrew.

Whispering words of comfort to the dying blossom, he felt the petals relax about him. He crept forth very cautiously, and found himself in an immense, gloomily vaulted hall, whose windows were like the mouths of a deep cavern. The place was a sort of alchemy, a den of alien sorceries and abhorrent pharmaceuticals. Everywhere, in the gloom, there were vats, cupels, furnaces, alembics and matrasses of unhuman form, bulking and towering colossally to the pigmy eyes of Maal Dweb. Close at hand, a monstrous cauldron rumed like a crater of black metal, its curving sides ascending far above the magician's head. None of the Ispazars was in sight, but, knowing that they might return at any moment, he hastened to make ready against them, feeling, for the first time in many years, the thrill of peril and expectation.

Manipulating the second amulet, he regained his normal proportions. The room, though still spacious, was no longer a hall of giants, and the cauldron beside him sank and lessened till its rim rose only to his shoulder. He saw now that the cauldron was filled with an unholy mixture of ingredients, among which were finely shredded portions of the missing flower women, together with the gall of chimeras and the ambergris of leviathans. Heated by unseen fires, it boiled tumultuously, foaming with black, patchy bubbles, and putting forth a nauseous vapor.

With the shrewd eye of a past master of all chemic lore, Maal Dweb proceeded to estimate the cauldron's various contents, and was then able to divine the purpose for which the brewage was intended. The conclusion to which he was driven appalled him slightly, and served to heighten his respect for the power and science of the reptile sorcerers. He saw, indeed, that it would be highly advisable to arrest their evolution.

After brief reflection it occurred to him that, in accordance with chemical laws, the adding of certain simple components to the brewage would bring about an eventuation neither desired nor anticipated by the Ispazars. On high tables about the walls of the alchemy, there were jars, flasks and vials containing subtle drugs and powerful elements, some of which were drawn from the more arcanic kingdoms of nature. Disregarding the moon-powder, the coals of star fire, the jellies made from the brains of gorgons, the ichor of salamanders, the dust of lethal fungi, the marrow of sphinxes, and other equally quaint and pernicious matters, the magician soon found the essences that he required. It was the work of an instant to pour them into the seething cauldron, and having done this, he awaited with composure the return of the reptiles.

The flower woman, in the meanwhile, had ceased to moan and twitch. Maal



Dweb knew that she was dead, since beings of this genus were unable to survive long when uprooted with such violence from their natal soil. She had folded herself to the face in her straitened petals, as if in a red and blackening shroud. He regarded her briefly, not without commiseration, and at that moment he heard the voices of the seven Ispazars, who had now re-entered the alchemy.

They came toward him among the crowded vessels, walking erect in the fashion of men on their short lizard legs, their ribbed and sabled wings retracted behind them, and their eyes glaring red in the gloom. Two of them were armed with long, sinuous bladed knives, and others were equipped with enormous adamantine pestles, to be employed, no doubt, in bruising the flesh of the floral vampire.

When they saw the enchanter, they were both startled and angered. Their necks and torsos began to swell like the hoods of cobras, and a great hissing rose among them, like the noise of jetted steam. Their aspect would have struck terror to the heart of any common man; but Maal Dweb confronted them calmly, repeating aloud, in low, even tones, a word of sovereign protective power.

The Ispazars hurled themselves toward him, some running along the floor with an undulant slithering motion, and others rising on rapid beating vans to attack him from above. All, however, dashed themselves vainly on the sphere of unseen force he had drawn about him through the utterance of the word of power. It was a strange thing to see them clawing vengefully at the void air, or striking futile blows with their weapons which rang as if on a brazen wall.

Now, perceiving that the man before them was a sorcerer, the reptile magicians began to make use of their own abhuman sorcery. They called from the air great bolts of livid flame, python shapen, which leaped and writhed incessantly, warring with the sphere of protective power, driving it back as a shield is driven by press of numbers in battle, but never breaking it down entirely. Also, they chanted evil, sibilant runes that were designed to charm away the magician's memory, and cause him to forget his magic. Sore was the travail of Maal Dweb as he fought the serpent fires and runes, and blood mingled with the sweat of his brow from that endeavor. But still, as the bolts struck nearer and the singing loudened, he kept uttering the untorgotten word; and the word still protected him.

Now, above the snaky chanting, he heard the deep hiss of the cauldron, boiling more turbulently than before because of those matters which he had added to its contents. And he saw, between the ever writhing bolts, that a more voluminous vapor, dark as the steam of a prima, ten, was mounting from the cauldron and spreading throughout the alchemy.

Soon the Ispazars were immersed in the fumes, as in a cloud of darkness; and dimly they began to coil and twist, convulsed with a strange agony. The python flames died out on the air, and the hissings of the Ispazars became inarticulate as those of common serpents. Then, falling to the floor, while the



black mist gathered and thickened above them, they crawled to and fro on their bellies in the fashion of true reptiles, and, emerging at times from the vapor, they shrank and dwindled as if hell fire had consumed them.

All this was even as Maal Dweb had planned. He knew that the Ispazars had forgotten their sorcery and science; and a swift devolution, flinging them back to the lowest state of serpenthood, had come upon them through the action of the vapor. But, before the completion of the change, he admitted one of the seven Ispazars to the sphere that now served to protect him from the flames. The creature fawned at his feet like a tame dragon, acknowledging him for its master. Then, presently, the cloud of vapor began to lift, and he saw the other Ispazars, who were now little larger than ten snakes. Their wings had withered into useless frills, and they crept and hissed on the floor, amid the alembics and crucibles and athanors of their lost science.

Maal Dweb regarded them for a little, not without pride in his own sorcery. The struggle had been difficult, even dangerous; and he reflected that his boredom had been thoroughly overcome, at least for the nonce. From a practical standpoint, he had done well; for, in ridding the flower-women of their persecutors, he had also eradicated a possible future menace to his own dominion over the worlds of the three suns.

Turning to that Ispazar which he had spared for a necessary purpose, he seated himself firmly astride its back, behind the thick jointing of the vans. He spoke a magic word that was understood by the monster. Bearing him between its wings, it rose and flew obediently through one of the high windows; and leaving behind it forever the citadel that was not to be scaled by man, nor by any wingless creature, it carried the magician over the red horns of the sable mountains, across the valley where dwelt the sisterhood of floral vampires, and descended on the mossy knoll at the end of that silver drawbridge whereby he had entered Votalp. There Maal Dweb dismounted; and, followed by the crawling Ispazar, he began his return journey to Xiccarph through the hueless cloud, above the multi-dimensional deeps.

Midway in that peculiar transit, he heard a sharp, sudden clapping of wings. It ceased with remarkable abruptness, and was not repeated. Looking back, he found that the Ispazar had fallen from the bridge, and was vanishing brokenly amid unreconcilable angles, in the gulf from which there was no return.



## *The Night Wire*

*by H. F. Arnold*

*Magazines featuring novelettes and short stories must, because of editorial requirements, treat very short stories as mere filler material, to plug up loose pages after the main body of the issue has been completed. Therefore when a short short story brings forth from readers a larger volume of acclaim than all the other stories in the issue combined—and sets an all-time record for any story in the magazine's history—then that short short must be a very special clasic indeed. The name of the story that achieved such unexpected applause from the readers of *Weird Tales* is "The Night Wire." Read it yourself and you will understand why it is considered a gem worthy of Poe.*

EW YORK, September 30 CP

Flash.

"Ambassador Holliwell died here today. The end came suddenly as the ambassador was alone in his study. . . ."

There is something ungodly about these night wire jobs. You sit up here on the top floor of a skyscraper and listen in to the whispers of a civilization—New York, London, Calcutta, Bombay, Singapore—they're your next door neighbors after the street lights go dim and the world has gone to sleep.

Along in the quiet hours between two and four, the receiving operators doze over the sounders and the news comes in. Fires and disasters and suicides. Murders, crowds, catastrophes. Sometimes an earthquake with a casualty list as long as your arm. The night wire man takes it down almost in his sleep, picking it off on his typewriter with one finger.

Once in a long time you prick up your ears and listen. You've heard of some one you knew in Singapore, Halifax or Paris, long ago. Maybe they've been promoted, but more probably they've been murdered or drowned. Perhaps they just decided to quit and took some bizarre way out. Made it interesting enough to get in the news.

But that doesn't happen often. Most of the time you sit and doze and tap, tap on your typewriter and wish you were home in bed.



Sometime, though, queer things happen. One did the other night, and I haven't got over it yet. I wish I could.

You see, I handle the night manager's desk in a western seaport town; what the name is, doesn't matter.

There is, or rather was, only one night operator on my staff, a fellow named John Morgan, about forty years of age, I should say, and a sober, hard-working sort.

He was one of the best operators I ever knew, what is known as a "double" man. That means he could handle two instruments at once and type the stories on different typewriters at the same time. He was one of the three men I ever knew who could do it consistently, hour after hour, and never make a mistake.

Generally we used only one wire at night, but sometimes when it was late and the news was coming fast, the Chicago and Denver stations would open a second wire, and then Morgan would do his stuff. He was a wizard, a mechanical automatic wizard which functioned marvelously but was without imagination.

On the night of the sixteenth he complained of feeling tired. It was the first and last time I had ever heard him say a word about himself, and I had known him for three years.

It was just three o'clock and we were running only one wire. I was nodding over reports at my desk and not paying much attention to him, when he spoke.

"Jim," he said, "does it feel close in here to you?"

"Why no, John," I answered, "but I'll open a window if you like."

"Never mind," he said. "I reckon I'm just a little tired."

That was all that was said, and I went on working. Every ten minutes or so I would walk over and take a pile of copy that had stacked up neatly beside the typewriter as the messages were printed out in triplicate.

It must have been twenty minutes after he spoke that I noticed he had opened up the other wire and was using both typewriters. I thought it was a little unusual, as there was nothing very "hot" coming in. On my next trip I picked up the copy from both machines and took it back to my desk to sort out the duplicates.

The first wire was running out the usual sort of stuff and I just looked over it hurriedly. Then I turned to the second pile of copy. I remembered it particularly because the story was from a town I had never heard of. "Xebico." Here is the dispatch. I saved a duplicate of it from our files.

"Xebico, Sept 16 CP BULLETIN

"The heaviest mist in the history of the city settled over the town at 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon. All traffic has stopped and the mist hangs like a pall over everything. Lights of ordinary intensity fail to pierce the fog, which is constantly growing heavier.

"Scientists here are unable to agree as to the cause, and the local weather bureau states that the like has never occurred before in the history of the city



"At 7 p. m. last night municipal authorities—  
(more)"

That was all there was. Nothing out of the ordinary at a bureau headquarters, but, as I say, I noticed the story because of the name of the town.

It must have been fifteen minutes later that I went over for another batch of copy. Morgan was slumped down in his chair and had switched his green electric light shade so that the gleam missed his eyes and hit only the top of the two typewriters.

Only the usual stuff was in the right hand pile, but the left hand batch carried another story from Xebico. All press clippings come in "takes" meaning that parts of many different stories are strung along together, perhaps with but a few paragraphs of each coming through at a time. This second story was marked "add fog." Here is the copy:

"At 7 p. m. the fog had increased noticeably. All lights were now invisible and the town was shrouded in pitch darkness

"As a peculiarity of the phenomenon, the fog is accompanied by a sickly odor, comparable to nothing yet experienced here."

Below that in customary press fashion was the hour, 3:27, and the initials of the operator, JM.

There was only one other story in the pile from the second wire. Here it is:

"2nd add Xebico Fog.

"Accounts as to the origin of the mist differ greatly. Among the most unusual is that of the sexton of the local church, who groped his way to headquarters in a hysterical condition and declared that the fog originated in the village churchyard.

" 'It was first visible as a soft gray blanket clinging to the earth above the graves,' he stated. 'Then it began to rise, higher and higher. A subterranean breeze seemed to blow it in billows, which split up and then joined together again.

" 'Fog phantoms, writhing in anguish, twisted the mist into queer forms and figures. And then, in the very thick midst of the mass, something moved.

" 'I turned and ran from the accursed spot. Behind me I heard screams coming from the houses bordering on the graveyard'

"Although the sexton's story is generally discredited, a party has left to investigate. Immediately after telling his story, the sexton collapsed and is now in a local hospital, unconscious."

Queer story, wasn't it? Not that we aren't used to it, for a lot of unusual stories come in over the wire. But for some reason or other, perhaps because it was so quiet that night, the report of the fog made a great impression on me.

It was almost with dread that I went over to the waiting piles of copy. Morgan did not move, and the only sound in the room was the tap-tap of the sounders. It was ominous, nerve-racking.

There was another story from Xebico in the pile of copy. I seized on it anxiously.



### "New Lead Xebico Fog CP

"The rescue party which went out at 11 p. m. to investigate a weird story of the origin of a fog which, since late yesterday, has shrouded the city in darkness, has failed to return. Another and larger party has been dispatched.

"Meanwhile the fog has, if possible, grown heavier. It seeps through the cracks in the doors and fills the atmosphere with a depressing odor of decay. It is oppressive, terrifying, bearing with it a subtle impression of things long dead.

"Residents of the city have left their homes and gathered in the local church, where the priests are holding services of prayer. The scene is beyond description. Grown folk and children are alike terrified and many are almost beside themselves with fear.

"Amid the wisps of vapor which partly veil the church auditorium, an old priest is praying for the welfare of his flock. They alternately wail and cross themselves.

"From the outskirts of the city may be heard cries of unknown voices. They echo through the fog in queer uncadenced minor keys. The sounds resemble nothing so much as wind whistling through a gigantic tunnel. But the night is calm and there is no wind. The second rescue party—(more)"

I am a calm man and never in a dozen years spent with the wires have been known to become excited, but despite myself I rose from my chair and walked to the window.

Could I be mistaken, or far down in the canyons of the city beneath me did I see a faint trace of fog? Pshaw! It was all imagination.

In the pressroom the click of the sounders seemed to have raised the tempo of their tune. Morgan alone had not stirred from his chair. His head sunk between his shoulders, he tapped the dispatches out on the typewriters with one finger of each hand.

He looked asleep. Maybe he was—but no; endlessly, efficiently, the two machines rattled off line after line, as relentlessly and effortlessly as death itself. There was something about the monotonous movement of the typewriter keys that fascinated me. I walked over and stood behind his chair, reading over his shoulder the type as it came into being, word by word.

Ah, here was another:

"Flash Xebico CP

"There will be no more bulletins from this office. The impossible has happened. No messages have come into this room for twenty minutes. We are cut off from the outside and even the streets below us.

"I will stay with the wire until the end.

"It is the end, indeed. Since 4 p. m. yesterday the fog has hung over the city. Following reports from the sexton of the local church, two rescue parties were sent out to investigate conditions on the outskirts of the city. Neither party has ever returned nor was any word received from them. It is quite certain now that they will never return.

"From my instrument I can gaze down on the city beneath me. From



the position of this room on the thirteenth floor, nearly the entire city can be seen. Now I can only see a thick blanket of blackness where customarily are lights and life.

"I fear greatly that the wailing cries heard constantly from the outskirts of the city are the death cries of the inhabitants. They are constantly increasing in volume and are approaching the center of the city.

"The fog yet hangs over everything. If possible, it is even heavier than before, but the conditions have changed. Instead of an opaque, impenetrable wall of odorous vapor, there now swirls and writhes a shapeless mass in contortions of almost human agony. Now and again the mass parts and I catch a brief glimpse of the streets below.

"People are running to and fro, screaming in despair. A vast bedlam of sound flies up to my window, and above all is the immense whistling of unseen and unfelt winds.

"The fog has again swept over the city and the whistling is coming closer and closer.

"It is now directly beneath me.

"God! An instant ago the mist opened and I caught a glimpse of the streets below.

"The fog is not simply vapor—it lives! By the side of each moaning and weeping human is a companion figure, an aura of strange and vari-colored hues. How the shapes cling! Each to a living thing!

"The men and women are down. Flat on their faces. The fog figures caress them lovingly. They are kneeling beside them. They are—but I dare not tell it.

"The prone and writhing bodies have been stripped of their clothing. They are being consumed—piecemeal.

"A merciful wall of hot, steamy vapor has swept over the whole scene. I can see no more.

"Beneath me the wall of vapor is changing colors. It seems to be lighted by internal fires. No, it isn't. I have made a mistake. The colors are from above, reflections from the sky.

"Look up! Look up! The whole sky is in flames. Colors as yet unseen by man or demon. The flames are moving; they have started to intermix; the colors rearrange themselves. They are so brilliant that my eyes burn, yet they are a long way off.

"Now they have begun to swirl, to circle in and out, twisting in intricate designs and patterns. The lights are racing each with each, a kaleidoscope of unearthly brilliance.

"I have made a discovery. There is nothing harmful in the lights. They radiate force and friendliness, almost cheeriness. But by their very strength, they hurt.

"As I look, they are swinging closer and closer, a million miles at each jump. Millions of miles with the speed of light. Aye, it is light, the quin-



tescence of all light. Beneath it the fog melts into a jeweled mist, radiant, rainbow-colored of a thousand varied spectra.

"I can see the streets. Why, they are filled with people! The lights are coming closer. They are all around me. I am enveloped. I—"

The message stopped abruptly. The wire to Xebico was dead. Beneath my eyes in the narrow circle of light from under the green lamp-shade, the black printing no longer spun itself, letter by letter, across the page.

The room seemed filled with a solemn quiet, a silence vaguely impressive, powerful. I looked down at Morgan. His hands had dropped nervelessly at his sides, while his body had hunched over peculiarly. I turned the lamp-shade back, throwing the light squarely in his face. His eyes were staring, fixed.

Filled with a sudden foreboding, I stepped beside him and called Chicago on the wire. After a second the sounder clicked its answer.

Why? But there was something wrong. Chicago was reporting that Wire Two had not been used throughout the evening.

"Morgan!" I shouted. "Morgan! Wake up, it isn't true. Some one has been hoaxing us. Why—" In my eagerness I grasped him by the shoulder.

His body was quite cold. Morgan had been dead for hours. Could it be that his sensitized brain and automatic fingers had continued to record impressions even after the end?

I shall never know, for I shall never again handle the night shift. Search in a world atlas discloses no town of Xebico. Whatever it was that killed John Morgan will forever remain a mystery.



## *Through the Vibrations*

*by P. Schuyler Miller*

*The legend of Atlantis, which dates back to Plato, has intrigued men for ages. Roman philosophers, Medieval monks, Victorian archeologists, and modern mystics have each taken a crack at the story, have weighed in their various balances the pros and cons of the legendary lost continent. You could arouse violent argument even today among some oceanographers and geologists with the Atlantis legend. It is an historical wonder worthy of the pen of an H. Merritt. So it is not without expectation that we recognize the Merritt influence in this excellent novelette by P. Schuyler Miller. Miller combines many of the elements of the lost continent legend with some ideas of his own, and in "Through the Vibrations" carries us, through the veil of time to unravel to his own satisfaction this most intriguing of ancient mysteries.*

"if I am wrong, well, then——"

"Then I am out of luck," I finished for him.

"Exactly," he agreed. "You may be able to return safely to our own system, but even then, you may materialize within some object, or in space, and so be crashed or frozen. Or you may do the same there, even if I am right. You are certainly taking a great chance, if you decide to go!"

"You can't phase me, Doc! I'm on! And I'm going first, no one will miss me."

About three years before my decision, as recorded above, I found myself with a college diploma and no job. Apparently nobody would trust the ability of an "infant prodigy" who had his B.S. at nineteen. So it was that I was practically on my last legs when Dr. Alexander Gregory, usually known as "Doc," came to board at the farm where I was filling in for a few days while the hay loader was out of commission. He had sympathy as well as money, and Christmas of that year found me installed as personal assistant in his private laboratories at Schenectady, where he cooperated with the General Electric Company, patron of Steinmetz, Langmuir, Coolidge, and so many of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century.



About noon on the day of which I am speaking, he called me into his 'holy et holes,' where he had been working since long before I met him, on some project unknown even to me, who had come to be closest to him in every other task.

"Jack," he broke out, "we will grant the existence of an ether."

"With pleasure," I grinned.

"There is something there that carries light and the rest of the vibrations as it carries sound, or rather, as a wave is carried in a long, taut wire or a string, for light waves are transverse rather than longitudinal vibrations. What it is, we don't know. It may be a substance, it may be another vibration, it may be geometry—as some believe, but it's there, at least so far as our minds can fathom. Most men call it ether. That's good enough for me."

"Suits me, too, Doc. I won't argue the point."

"Light, heat, radio waves, X-rays, all are transverse waves in ether, or have the properties of such waves. You know that. Any fool does, or should. What is more, matter is a vibration too. The electrons and protons, or, more probably, the sub-electrons and sub-protons, if they exist, are little foci of infinitesimal waves, ether waves, so tiny that they seem solid. We are not really sure that it is so, we can never be, I believe, for we can not see them, but electrons behave as if it were, and I don't care very much so long as I can do what I want with them. Who cares whether his candy is flavored with natural wintergreen, so long as it tastes as he expects it to? I can make matter act as it would, if it were built up of tiny waves, and practically that is as much as I care to know. So let us call them waves.

"In our plane, our system I call it, we can see waves with frequencies of from 370 million million to 770 million million—roughly, from the deepest red to the darkest violet. The infra-red waves, the heat radiations, extend from 370 million million down to 950 thousand million. The ultra-violet runs from the visible violet up to about 6 million million million. Farther yet are the X-rays, in the region about 3000 million million million million. And somewhere beyond lies our fundamental, our 'matter wave.' Why, if we were to take the diameter of an electron for a wavelength, which I am perfectly sure it is not, the resultant frequency would be approximately 75 septillions—seventy-five with twenty-one zeros following along after it. And the actual frequency must be greater, far greater than that! But you know all that. I have been talking as if you were some tabloid reporter.

"Of what lies beyond we know nothing, have known nothing. For years I have hoped to explore the gaps on either side of our fundamental. Now I believe that I have succeeded, that I can cause our matter units, whatever they may be, to vibrate in resonance with any frequency desired. You, Jack, could be a blob of green light or a bunch of radio waves, probably static, if you wanted to. Yet, because of the relativity of the universe, you would note no difference in yourself. If I were to step you down four hundred trillion vibrations or so a second, those gorgeous lavender suspenders and your sage knickers would be all I could see of you. But I could feel the heat



radiated by your blue eyes and your socks. That red apple on the table would be the color of a grape to you. The grapes themselves might sunburn you with their ultra-violet radiation. And, to yourself, you would remain the same as ever, trousers, suspenders, and all. What is more, if there chanced to be another system whose fundamental, whose 'matter-wave' coincided with your own, you could perceive it, you would be a part of it, while to me it remained invisible.

"It is my theory, my hope, that the characteristics of true space are absolute, that wherever in our system space has so focused matter as to form the suns and the planets, all the myriad bodies of the many universes, it will focus in a similar manner the 'matter waves' of every plane. No natural law holds unmodified by circumstance, and I do not mean that in these other planes there will be a pebble where there is one here, or a duplicate of yourself in relatively the same position that you occupy, for, to my mind, such a situation would be absurd and even impossible. The generalities will be the same, a sun for a sun, perhaps a planet for a planet, but the lesser details will be almost inevitably different. If it is as I think, Jack, you, and later I, may don the suit that I have prepared, strap the little box containing the resonator to your waist, set the dials, press a button and step off. We *will* do it!

"On the other hand, if I am wrong, well, then——

"Then I am out of luck."

Our plans were soon made. I, with the ray proof suit, impervious to the dangerous radiations, with the tiny, compact and delicate resonator, and with a second powerful beam resonator which would "step up" objects at a distance of as much as a kilometer, would go ahead. If I found any system where I could stop safely I would accordingly do so, and send back to the laboratory, with the aid of my beam resonator, a platinum plate engraved with the readings of my various dials. Then Doc, instructing the other lab assistants, would send on such equipment as I might need, following it in person.

If, however, I could find no landing place, I was to continue through the vibrations until I was visible to Doc as a blob of yellow, then stop. It was with me, and I was able to hang relatively motionless in space, Doc could focus his own beam resonator on me and send me back to our own fundamental, provided, of course, that my resonator and other instruments would not work in reverse, and that the earth and, indeed, all the universe, did not whisk itself away into space when I stopped. Heaven help me if I should be retracted, though I should probably be right of a single color.

At last the day set for the experiment came. Full details of past work and of the experiment itself were carefully stowed away in the vaults. Arrangements for the future, in case either or both of us should not return, were made. The chief assistants were instructed as to our system of signals and how to reply to them with the aid of the spare beam resonator that we left behind. Finally, the very few scientists who could be persuaded to come



were assembled, with suitable representatives of the press and the movies. It was to be decidedly a gala occasion!

At last the hour arrived, Zero Hour as it was called in France. Dressed in my insulated, ray proof space suit, with its great quartz globe of a head, covered with insulating shutters and armed with periscopic televisions, its instrument belt, where hung a bewildering array of boxes, dials, projectors, and control leads, and its pressure control and air-renewer, I sat in an easy chair before the half circle of obvious skeptics. Doc stood beside me, his hand on my shoulder, explaining the apparatus.

He was finished. For a moment he gripped my shoulder, then released me and nodded. Even as they disappeared, I could see the faces of the scientists take on an expression of incredulity and wonder. Then they were gone, leaving fading bodies that suddenly winked out. A Negro, Doc's chauffeur, lasted longest, passing through intermediate red green shades, indescribably weird, into an intense red, very dark, then slowly fading into a shimmering phantom that vanished almost immediately. Then a flashing, changing panorama of myriad vivid colors and marvelous combinations, rich, beautiful beyond imagination, a formless mass of dazzling, leaping flame that filled all the empty heavens with its wondrous glory. And then darkness. I had entered a region of no vibration.

For a moment I was panic stricken. I was lost, hopelessly lost in eternal darkness, unable to see my dials and instruments, speeding endlessly through the unknown! It was the end! Never again would I see old earth, my own little speck in endlessness. Never again would I feel Doc's fond grip on my shoulder, see the flash of black Tom's ivory teeth, handle the loved familiar instruments, gaze through the powerful microscope at the endless crystalline forms showing so clearly in the blazing light of—

I flushed and grinned sheepishly. Here were the lamps at my forehead and wrists, ready to flash into instant light, real, visible, white light from a source independent of outside vibration. Of course Doc had prepared for such an emergency! I puckered my lips to form the whistle that would send them flashing into luminescence, then halted as other light burst on me, first glorious purple, then sapphire, emerald, all the colors of the spectrum, leaping, playing, and—taking shape! I slowed down, released my death grip on the control, stopped, and awkwardly scrambling, shot upwards.

I was floating, helpless in my air-distended suit, in a pool of deep green, steaming liquid. I floated about as high as I would have at home, in the sea. And sure enough, water it was. Above me, in the misty heavens, shone a great ball of green flame, filling nearly a quarter of the dome of the blue green, a monster sun. More I could not see, for the quartz globe that held my head had sunk deeper than the rest, and was almost entirely submerged. Patting my hand to my belt, I felt for the button that controlled the periscope, found it; raised my "extra eye" into position. Sure enough, there was land near me, steep clay banks, a great level platform of deep purple crystal, and above, snowing at the summit of the red clay cliffs—grass.



Madly I paddled to the shore, puffing and floundering like a walrus, and climbed out on the amethyst platform, for such it was. The clay banks were too steep for me to climb alone, so, taking out my tools and platinum plate from the watertight compartment in my belt, I set to work. Unthinking I had unscrewed the globe from my head, a truly rash thing to do, for I had not consulted the atmosphere analyser dials, so great was the feeling that I was merely in some unexplored corner of Earth. Luck was with me, however, for the air was safe. It was denser than our own air, with a good deal more carbon dioxide and oxygen, and less nitrogen, but decidedly breathable. So, inscribing my dial readings and a rough map of my locality, with a few brief explanatory words, I laid it in the middle of the crystal platform, set the control dial of my beam resonator, and pressed the trigger button. The platinum, and part of the platform disappeared almost instantly, with a faint bluish glow caused by fluorescence of the abnormally excited atoms. Doc told me later that they materialized beneath the chair of one of the doubting Thomases, old Barnes, upsetting that grouchy and self-righteous individual both physically and mentally. Fortunately, the beam had penetrated into the amethyst a little deeper than my original immersion, about ten feet, thus preventing any serious trouble in Doc's journey.

As soon as he had read my message, he began to alter his plans to fit the conditions that I reported. All the supplies were enclosed in a sealed metal cylinder and projected from my former position, then, standing upon the amethyst pillar that protruded from the crumpled concrete of the laboratory floor, he "stepped off" himself.

Meanwhile I was trying to gouge enough steps in the red clay walls of my prison so that I might take a look at the hidden outside world, but vainly, for the clay very naturally crumbled as soon as I put any weight on it. Suddenly a metal cylinder popped to the surface of the quiet green pool, and a second later Doc, traveling a good deal slower than I had, appeared in a manner befitting the renowned Cheshire cat, on the spot where a moment before had been an elliptical hole in the crystal. He grinned, waved an insulated mitten, and began to unscrew his helmet, looking around him as he worked.

"Where do we go from here, and how, Professor?" he asked, removing the great globe from his head.

"Search me," I answered. "You won't find any ladder in my pocket."

"Well, let's try mine. Where the deuce is my pocketbook? Oh, there it is," pointing to the cylinder, "I must have dropped it. Here Fido!" He whistled sharply.

Sure enough, the cylinder began to hurry through the water toward us. It was uncanny, even though I knew that there was a motor and propeller in each end, keyed to different notes.

Hauling the heavy cylinder up on our natural pier, we opened it. I was anxious to see what Doc had sent. First out were a pair of individual flyers, with helicopter and pusher attachments. One strapped the apparatus to his



wast and shoulders, ran his fingers over the rather complex keyboard, and flew. They were one of the greatest productions of the century. These, unlike most of the commoner types, could be run either by the usual power beam or by individual power plants, with extremely compact storage batteries of the latest sort.

In addition, there were photographic equipment, condensed food, binoculars, compact sending and receiving sets for communication in case we became separated, projector pistols for either explosive bullets or short-circuiting rays, and, most important of all, a small power generator and transmitter, working by solar radiation. This, once set up and in order, would insure our power for flying so long as it went unharmed by outside agencies.

Doc had been taking in his surroundings while I unpacked and set up the generator. Suddenly he turned to me and spoke

"Jack! Do you notice anything out of the ordinary?"

"Plenty!" I replied. "Who ever saw an amethyst this size, water of that color, or a great green sun like that?"

"I mean, aside from that?"

"Why no, I can't say that I do, Doc. What's up?"

"Maybe it's just my imagination, but isn't it a wee bit cool for a sun of that size?"

"By Jove, so it is! Doesn't that mean——"

"That there is very little infra red radiation. Exactly. Give me the binoculars, the ones with the analysers. Setting the radiation screens, he focused them on the sun. Then, twirling the selection disk slowly, he gave me the readings, which I scratched on the clay. Sure enough, infra red radiation amounted to less than half that of our own sun; blue, yellow, and green predominated, while the ultra-violet was exceptionally strong.

"We're in for a siege of sunburn," I remarked.

"Rather. I'm glad I brought that skin wash. Here, sponge yourself with that, wear your goggles, and you'll be O. K."

"Thanks. I was afraid I'd look like a boiled lobster before long."

"Not now. Of course you'll tan, but you won't burn, and your eyes are protected. I'm glad that this generator doesn't depend entirely upon infra-red radiation, though I suppose we could step up the colors if we had to. Got it assembled yet? Good. We can leave it here, where we ought to be able to find it without difficulty, and where it is most likely to be safe. Start it now; I have our packs all ready."

I ran up the projector arm until it cleared the walls of the pit, anchored the machine firmly to both pier and bank and shoved over the lever. Immediately we heard the gentle, characteristic purr of the whirling mirrors, and the familiar green haze, hard to see in the light of the green sun, arose from the generator box. Then the projector arm began to spin, its drone rising to a thin whine, and to throw off little wreathes of tiny, pale violet



sparks Doc and I climbed into the harness of the flyers and then, Doc leading, we rose above the walls of the clay pit.

It was a strange landscape that lay before us. Behind, the green grass, long and heavy, with here and there a patch of huge green white flowers resembling clover, gently rose to the base of a great, jet-black cliff some ten or fifteen miles away. In the binocular flying goggles its pillar-like formation was plain. Before us, the same grassy meadow stretched for miles and miles into the distance, to meet the oily waters of a smooth green sea, so calm as to be mistaken for part of the level plain. Everywhere rose clusters of deep purple crystals, as big as and bigger than that of the pit, with here and there a single huge white one, or, rather, a more or less transparent one, that loomed like an obelisk against the green sky and the green sun. At their bases were the red clay pits, eroded by the tiny rills that wandered from the base of the black cliffs down between crimson banks of clay to the glassy waters of the sea or to one or another of the pits.

Still another thing struck us simultaneously. Despite the apparent size of the world on whose surface we stood, or, rather, in whose atmosphere we floated, the force of gravity was very little greater than on earth. In the pit, we had walked about freely, with approximately the effort of one who wades knee deep in water. Yet, as we could plainly see, the horizon was a good deal farther away than it would be on earth. There were, of course, several explanations. We might be on a large world of low density. We might be on a hollow planet. This world may have been flattened out more than the earth, into the form of an onion. And we might be at the pole of a world approximately earth-size.

The last explanation was soon ruled out, however, for while we were still engaged in exploring the long slope below the cliffs, the sun sank into the sea, and myriad stars began to appear, apparently more numerous as well as brighter than in our own system. Indeed, the heavens fairly blazed with white light, a great relief after the green glare of day. Here and there were great red and blue and yellow globes, shining against the white. We saw no other green suns, nor could we detect a satellite, but it was strikingly in support of Doc's theories to note that aside from the greater visibility of most of the stars, which changed the appearance of the heavens greatly, the familiar arrangements of the constellations were all apparent as at home, though most of the colors had changed. Willingly we returned to where the violet sparks of the projector showed now above the grassy slope, to wait beside the cylinder for the morrow.

The night was long, nearly twice the length of an earth night, and we later found that the day was correspondingly short, showing that the season was far advanced as on earth, but as a whole the period of rotation of this planet was greater by nearly half than our own. During the night, which we spent stargazing and planning, we thought that we noticed a sort of reddish glow above the distant cliffs, but we were content to leave further exploration until the morrow. When the sun appeared, we were ready



Rising once more from our pit, we sped to the foot of the cliffs, then rose vertically, parallel to their face.

At last we topped the great jet rampart, over a mile in height, and gazed out over the bare surface of the smooth, flat plain, leveled as if by artificial means, where no vegetation grew, no crystal jutted, no pit sank, only that hard, smooth surface stretching endlessly away into the distance. It was like some great pillar of rock pushed up from the nether world into the light of day, unruffled, cold and cruel, hard as only the compressed rock or a world heart can be. Yet the plain was, in truth, not entirely level, not totally unruffled. Far away, at the limit of the gaze, loomed an angular black mass. We sped toward it over the pitiless surface of the plateau. It grew, bulked huge, and towered above us.

It was a city, a great, black, towering city of the plateau. In twenty great terraces, each a hundred feet in height, it towered nearly half a mile above the plain. The base was square, perhaps a mile on a side, and in the center of each side, flanked by a pair of huge tapering amethyst obelisks, was a gate. Other opening in the sides of the lower terrace there was none, but in the higher ones were circular ports, twenty or thirty feet in diameter, placed midway of each wall, one facing each point of the compass. And atop the highest terrace, at the very summit of the gigantic pile, perched on the needle tip of a great black cone, was a mighty crystal globe, gazing coldly in the glare of the sun.

We floated close to the nearest gate, a peaked half-oval of deepest green, so dark as to be nearly black. Indeed, we looked a second time at the rock of the walls and of the plain to see if they, too, were not of the same color as the gates, but they were black, the same glossy jet. The green of the gate was unbroken, except for the very center, where a pale blue ellipse, seeming of metal, glowed. It seemed to radiate light of its own, but it was cold to the touch, deathly cold. And around its rim, as around the edge of the gate, ran a ribbon of pure soft gold, worked and tooled into millions of delicate geometric weavings.

The wall itself, as we viewed it closely, showed no joint, no sign of block or mortise. It seemed carved from the plateau as one might carve a shrine from the rock of a granite mountain. And over every square inch of its surface ran the twining lines of the delicate geometric filigree, a veritable maze of lines and angles and arcs in low relief, incredibly fine, and in very obvious order, in fixed relation to one another, though we could detect no repetition. Always there was some tiny variation in form that broke the monotony and made fantasy. It was truly wonderful, and strangely beautiful.

At last we left it, forced by the passing of time to continue our exploration. We rose above the floor of the first terrace, level and smooth as the plain itself, and advanced over the black seamless paving to the wall of the second terrace, and the gold rimmed opening. It was closed with a disk of transparent crystal, through which we could dimly see the black cylinder of



the corridor stretching unbroken into the darkness. Far away, practically invisible, a faint crimson glow seemed to bathe the jetty walls, though we could not be sure of it.

Toward the end of the day, as the great green sun was sinking low, we approached the slender conical spire at the summit of the city. It was of the same hard, black rock as the walls of the pile below it, the mighty close-barred edifice that it crowned. But it was smooth, from the spreading base that covered nearly half the topmost terrace to the needle-point two hundred feet above. And yet a dozen feet above its tip, floating in nothingness, hung the sphere.

It was of crystal, perhaps fifty feet in diameter, floating immobile above the tip of the city. The crystal was colorless, transparent and flawless, yet in its very heart we sensed a slightest hint of rosy opalescence, incredibly lovely after the harsh black of the walls and the pitiless green glare of the sun. Even as we watched, it seemed to deepen, to permeate all the interior of the sphere. Then, while the great sun sank into the oily sea beyond the cliffs, its rose glory burst into full bloom, a great gem of pulsing, star-flecked crimson flame, that bathed all the cold harsh terraces of the city with soft ruby light. Alarmed, we flew back into the darkness beyond its range. And as we withdrew, there rose from the ball of light a delicate pencil of lavender flame, a finger of rose blue that pointed up to the blazing heavens. It leapt up and up, faded, waxed, pulsed and grew still. Then it began to sing, a thin, ethereal piping that shrilled loud yet faint at the farthest limit of our senses. And as it sang, the disks of crystal that barred the portals sank back into their recesses, and then disappeared in the veiling darkness. The gates of the city had opened.

For a while we watched expectantly, waiting for the inhabitants of the colossal pile to come forth. Then, as nothing happened, we flew cautiously toward the nearest portal. Suddenly we were sucked into a rushing current of air that swept us irresistibly into the black throat of the circular corridor. We were whipped through the gaping opening, sucked down between the endless shining walls, then suddenly hurled back into the open air, where we managed to escape the flow of the current, hot now, where before it had been cool. For some time we watched, puzzling, then Doc motioned to me to come over to where he was hovering. He pointed down the long corridor to a point, dimly lit by the reddish glow, where it branched into three. The central opening and the one on the left were closed with disks of crystal. From the right-hand opening rushed the river of air. As we watched, a crystal disk sprang across its mouth, while the corridor to the left flew open, sucking in a torrent of night air. We dropped from level to level, alternately attracted and repelled by the floods of air. Everywhere were the three branching corridors with their crystal valves, though near the bottom we could not see them, for the corridors were too long. Above the keening of the flame and the wailing of the eddying winds, Doc shouted in my ear.



"The thing is breathing!" he yelled.

I looked at him aghast. "Is that alive?" I asked.

"No, no. It's some sort of a machine, a ventilating system for the city and for whatever is below. The planet must be hollow. There are probably hundreds or thousands of these, sucking in fresh air and blowing out the stale, whenever night comes. The flame is a signal. It opens the valves with a certain note, just as we whistle for our lights, or as I called the cylinder. How it is produced I can't even guess, perhaps by some electrical phenomenon, but that is what it's for. Here, lay your fingers against the wall. Feel it?"

I obeyed. Sure enough, I could faintly feel the throb, throb, throb of great pumps sucking in the life giving air, belching forth the impure. A sudden thought came to me.

"Doc! I shouted. "They must be like us, they breathe!"

Doc shook his head. "Not at all," he replied. "They may eat it, as men once believed the chameleon did. They may extract certain gases for fuel in their machines, or whatever they use. They may use it in pneumatic tubes. It's probable that they do anything but breathe it. We are really freaks of nature, we men. You know that, Jack. The things below may not even be organic. I doubt if they are."

We were silent for a moment, then: "Doc!"

"Yes?"

"Are we going in there? To see what they look like?"

"It is our duty as scientists, Jack."

"I know, but is there any good in going? Won't it be just useless?"

"Nothing is useless, Jack. You should know that by now."

"Yes, I suppose so. But aren't we likely to be trapped? What good could we do the world then? And how can we get in anyway? Those middle valves are closed."

Don't forget, we have our resonators. If we get in a tight place, we can use them. As to getting in, don't you remember the glow which we thought we saw during the day? I think that central valve is open in the daytime. We'll go in in the morning, as soon as the pumps stop, and wait for it to open."

"I'm game. How long before we start?"

"Nearly twelve hours, I think. You know, the nights are twice as long as on our own planet. Let's go back and take forty winks or so and a bite to eat. We may need it. And we'll have to wear our helmets, or at least, take them along, for we may have to use the resonators."

"Ah O. K. with me, Doc. A bit of food won't displease me at all."

At full speed we returned to the pit, and made our final preparations.

Two hours before dawn, Doc's electric alarm-clock awoke us with a slight shock. Screwing on the globes, and overhauling the generator, we set out, each with a good sized pack. The light was just fading from the sphere as we flew posthaste into the topmost opening. Behind us, the crystal disk clashed shut, barring the exit. Ahead, the short dark corridor extended as



at as the threefold parting where the central valve was slowly opening. Cautiously we flew to it, passed through, and looked down.

We gazed into a deep, smooth-walled shaft seemingly burned out of the black rock of the plateau, so smooth was its bore. For miles it extended below us, down into the heart of the planet. And somewhere, down there in the depths of the shaft, was the source of the rose glow that flooded all its smooth cylinder of black and coral and crimson, revealing the branching corridors of the ventilating plant, and lower a broad inclined plane that ran from the level of the plateau, the level of the great green gates, down into the roseate mist below.

"They must walk, as we do," I yelled to Doc.

"Um. Maybe. But you needn't yell. Use the 'phone. Come on."

He vaulted over the low railing that closed the end of the corridor, and, his helicopter whirring to break the fall, drifted rapidly down past the black corridor openings. I dove after him, bringing up with a jerk just above his head, and we floated down together.

At the plateau level we halted, and entered the corridor that led to the north gate. Straight to the great green slab it ran, dark and polished, its level floor thick with dust. No living creature, as we knew life, had passed here for long years. Weird blue-green light came in through the pale oval and lit the desolate vestibule dimly. It had odd mechanisms in abundance.

"Automatic apparatus," Doc grunted. "They've left the outside for good, apparently. Have no use for it, though it may be different somewhere else, at some other ventilator. I admit that this black desert isn't especially attractive."

"You're right," I agreed, "but we'll never find out about that if we stay up here in the attic. Let's go downstairs."

From the plateau level, the pit ran smooth and unmarred, except for the spiral plane. More than ever we gained the impression of a hole melted through black wax by a welding flame. Examination of the plane bore out this impression also, for at the edge nearest the wall it showed a decided jointure, as if it had been dovetailed into the wall after the pit was bored. Yet there were no visible joints in the plane itself. It was just another mystery, another paradox in this queer world.

For perhaps five miles the pit ran down, and for a major part of the time that we fell down its bore, the source of the rose glow was visible through the mist. It filled the entire bottom of the pit, a great, still pool of fire, seemingly, yet one that gave no heat. And as we sank deeper and deeper into the crimson mist that filled the lower part of the shaft, there came a queer, half-familiar tingling in those parts of our body that were exposed. Following Doc's example, I drew on the long gauntlets that hung at my belt.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I can't tell," came the answer over the phone, "but there's some sort of radiation. We had best be careful."

"Could it be some sort of searchlight?"

"Possibly. It's apparently a mirror of some sort, but what it reflects, and why, I can't say. It must have something to do with the ventilator, though."

"Yes, that seems clear enough. Doc, why mightn't the sphere up there be some sort of light sensitive cell that responds to a change in the intensity of this light and then controls the pumps by a sort of key note, as we saw last night?"

"It sounds plausible enough, Jack, but why did that flame appear, and what made it sing? Maybe, though, that part of its radiation that isn't light has something to do with it. It is certainly beyond my experience."

"I'll say so! Let's put on a bit more speed. I'm anxious to see what the thing really is."

As we drew nearer to the bottom of the shaft, we could see that the seeming pool was indeed a huge parabolic reflector. Its surface was of a queer metal such as we had never before seen—apparently self-luminous, and capable of taking and retaining a high polish. Aside from its own radiance, it reflected the crimson light that poured from a large globe of the same metal, placed at its focus. This light source was covered partially by a lead shutter, which revolved slowly, apparently in the same period as the planet itself, and controlled the strength of the radiation. It was akin to our own smaller searchlights and parabolic reflectors, but cleverer and better developed.

So engrossed had we been with our examination that we had not noticed our surroundings. Now, looking up, we found that the mirror lay in a deep bronze bowl, firmly bolted to the rock, in which the pit terminated. Above us, halfway to the rim of the bowl, a narrow balcony ran around the sides of this giant's cup of light, on which the inclined plane ended. From it several small doors opened, as well as a great peaked gate of metal with the port of bluish transparent metal, such as the great gates of the ventilator had had. This stood half open, showing part of a jagged rocky ceiling that glowed faintly in crimson light that flooded up from below. And everywhere the dust lay thick.

I ran out on the broad balcony that surrounded the outside of the bowl. Great cables anchored the cup to the rock of the ceiling, built to withstand the fearful gales that must result when the powerful pumps of the ventilators drew the foul air from this hidden underworld and hurled back the pure air of the outer planet. No wonder the ventilators worked only at night, for were they to act during the day, any high flying aircraft that the builders of this world possessed must surely be dashed against the rough ceiling unless they kept to the lower levels. It was remarkable to me that the gray dust should hang so long, even though the interior of the bowl was almost entirely sheltered from the wind. Leaning over the waist-high railing, I looked down at the city beneath, a real city this time, rising in a steep pyramid from the smooth



rolling plain of the cavern floor—a city that we came to know very well in the weeks that followed.

From a wide zone of low, rather uninteresting buildings built on the level of the plain, the city rose in three terraces, each narrower than the preceding one, and each distinguished by more lavish and beautiful architecture than its lower neighbor. Four broad inclined planes led upward from great stone gates in the wall that surrounded the lowest zone, while raised runways, escalators, and, in a few cases, streets, made possible communication and transportation in each zone. A majority of these details, of course, we did not observe until much later, after we had been in the city for some time. Indeed, but for a moving picture we might never have learned that the very vitals of the city, its trunk lines, dynamos, and individual ventilators, were hidden in the heart of the mound, and attainable through only a few inconspicuous entrances.

Architecturally, the place was a puzzle. I might say, as Doc did, that it was like “nothing of Earth, yet like everything on Earth.” For there was a certain undefinable unity in it all, despite the really glaring dissimilarities of its parts. The most obvious explanation, which we later found to be essentially true, was that each zone aligned a social class or caste, while each class was limited as to its style of architecture. The evident arrangement bore this out, and later information from the library confirmed practically all our theories.

The lowest zone was of squat cubicles, much like our own buildings but more regular, with no single curve. Nor was there any visible decoration, aside from that afforded by a few lateral bands of a blue pigment. The first wall, around the entire city, appeared to have been plated with brass, now sadly tarnished, while the gates, like, indeed, the gates of every level, were of the green stone, gold rimmed, and set with the cold, blue ovals.

In the second zone, within a low wall, tin plated, began the realm of the curve. Here the architecture was more familiar, more earthly. There were domes and circular windows, and every edge was rounded. Yet, in general type, the cubicle prevailed. It was as though the citizens of the second zone adhered naturally to the style of the lower level, yet curved every possible angle to show that they *might* do so if they wished. We found later, from books, that this zone harbored the shops, and a few of the residences, of what we call the middle class, the tradesmen and professional men, who had ascended from the plebian level of the first zone, the zone of the common laborers, by reason of their own intelligence and ability.

The last wall was truly beautiful. It was plated all over with a form of the radiant metal, so that it cast a faint rose tint upon the roofs of the second zone. And here the gates were all fretted with little geometric filigree work, like the ventilator, inlaid with gold. The buildings themselves were clearly residences, beautiful mansions of fretted and carved marble, snowy white, quite unlike the dull red sandstone and brick of the lower levels. No building but had its frieze or its bas relief plaques set in the sides of the entry, walls everywhere, in niches, on pedestals, or lining the pathways, where fountains

played incessantly, were myriads of marble statues, groups as well as single figures, that were really miracles of skill and beauty.

This zone merged directly with the central mass, a single building of jet-black marble, shot with dull crimson. A narrow court surrounded it in which were fountains of marble and life-size statues of solid gold, alternating. For a hundred feet there were no openings save the four mighty gates of open flame. Then the entire building broke into a riot of intricate design—pinnacles, spires, minarets, arches, long festoons of conventional floral design, dripping with marble icicles, slender fretted pillars with elaborate capitals—a fairyland of orderly-d disorderly wonder and beauty. It resembled, in a way, the great carved temples of Angkor and the other lost cities of Cambodia, yet this carving was not preeminently pictorial, nor yet so conventional as we see on Earth. And from its utmost peak extended a slim, pointed pinnacle, entirely formed from a vein of the blood red marble. Above it floated a crystal sphere, like the sphere of the ventilator, that shed the same deep rose glow, a glow that was mirrored at half mile intervals about each terrace by lesser spheres, hovering above metal work towers. The effect of the entire mass was indescribably wonderful. And there was another city, a city that was to this as the Taj Mahal to Notre Dame—a city that we saw only in part. Perhaps it was well, after all, that we could not see it as it must have been, for even as things turned out, it has been hard never to return to that wonderful empire of a wonderful people. We have sworn, but perhaps some day even oaths will not hold us. Who knows?

So beautiful was the scene that lay before me, that some minutes passed before I realized the significance of what I saw. Indeed, we were a scant hundred feet from the upper terrace when I spoke.

"Doc," I cried, pointing to the statues, "*they're human!*"

"Yes," he said slowly, "they are human. It—well it upsets nearly everything that I thought I knew. I had believed that a type does not duplicate itself in the same relative plane of intelligence anywhere in our universe. Mathematics describe it, or so I supposed. There would be the same broad, general types of life, perhaps a few new ones here and there, but the range of intelligence would be different, and developed along different lines, studying different phases of Life and Space and Time. I—sometimes I should have welcomed a world of—civilized—ants, or spiders, or even plants. I think I would have been welcome among them. All too many are the times when I have longed to be free of the petty bickerings of my fellow men, and to submerge myself in Science, in the knowledge and understanding of our great universe! But it seems that I was wrong. I had hoped that our God was not a jealous, selfish God, limiting understanding to a single race, but a truly great, truly scientific God, a benevolent God, who would see no race neglected, no cosmic permutation untried, who would not suffer repetition of old, primitive forms lest He lose the urge of the eternally better! And—I was wrong."



"But, Doc, maybe it's a mere coincidence, or something. And, after all, isn't it rather wonderful to find Man here?"

"I suppose it is, Jack. You're right. It was just a bit of a blow to my vanity to have my pet theory disproved. Come, we have our work to do. We have forgotten our purpose in coming here. We can't hang here all day. Let's land."

So we sank to the marble paving of an ancient garden, where fountains still played merrily, although the flowers and trees and even the people, the men like ourselves, who once trod there, had long since gone. All the terrace was thick with a fine, spore like dust, showing no sign of footprint but our own. Our scuffling feet sent it up in thick gray clouds that swirled about our heads.

Doc had been examining the dust with a small but powerful lens from his belt set. Suddenly he sprang erect and cried, "Quick, the helmet! Pure oxygen! For your life!"

I obeyed instantly, substituting the oxygen flask for the usual respirator. Doc had done likewise. I motioned to the radio connection, but he waved me aside and brushed the dust from the broad rim of one of the fountains. Taking from his emergency case a beef culture, he set it in the cleared space and dropped on it a tiny pinch of the dust. Then he moistened it with water and stood back.

The surface of the culture seemed to writhe. Almost instantly it became a mass of swelling, twisting tubercles and fleshy tentacles, vegetable tentacles. Inside of a minute's time a repulsive mass of fleshy monstrosities rose where the culture had been, great livid sacs of dull purple on the end of thick stems of angry carmine, thick slabs of a sickening bilious yellow covered with little pale blue warts, twisting arms and tentacles of a dead white, flat and lustreless—a veritable nightmare jungle of disgusting fungus growths. And even as we watched, it crumbled and melted away into a thin film of gray dust, gray spores. I shuddered and turned away. Then came Doc's voice in the phones.

"Hang on, but I suppose you knew that. They're not used to much oxygen, apparently, it's too much for them. They grow faster, but they burn themselves up, literally, go all to spores and ash. They need organic food, so it's good we didn't breathe many. Look."

The culture had totally disappeared.

"I guess that's what did for these people of the city, Jack. They couldn't escape it, not many of them. Perhaps there are a few, somewhere, but this dust seems widespread, and we have seen no signs of living beings since we arrived."

"But how about the ventilator and the lights? There must be someone to run them. Maybe they're afraid. Maybe they're hiding from us."

No. That argument won't hold. You have seen, are seeing, the realization of a great many Utopian visions. This is an automatic world! The nation has died, the race has died, so far as we know, on this planet, yet

their cities and their ventilators, all the vast machinery of their vast civilization lies on a wide waste of the power that made Man eternally master over the machine! It must have been a great civilization. God alone knows how long this underworld has gone on like this and how long it will go on. Presumably the mechanism will wear out some day, and all the great mechanical life of the planet will finally stop forever, but that day may not come for many years. I would that it might never come, were it possible! Come, let us go into the building there, and see what we can find. Perhaps we may find some clue to the history of the race there. It seems to have been a building of importance."

The north gates were open, and we advanced noiselessly down the smooth black corridor, with the magnificent grey dust inches thick on the floor. For perhaps a hundred feet it ran, straight into the heart of the huge pile, smaller corridors branching off at regular intervals on either side. Then there was a second magnificent gate, a gate of hardened gold, which rose in a groove at a touch on a small bronze lever. Later we found that the opening mechanism could be locked from the inside. Evidently the ancient priests did not entirely trust their congregations.

Beyond the door lay the wonderland of the temple. There was a great oval room, below rose's egg, rising to a rounded dome two hundred or two hundred and fifty feet above the smooth sea-green pavement, flecked with little golden motes. The black of the exterior did not show through, except in a breast high band that ran all around the great room. All of its mighty, smooth oval was of the snowiest of marbles, veined faintly with gold, with sea-green, and with the rosy metal. This last formed a veritable maze of fine veins in the very summit of the temple, filling all those dim upper spaces with its roseate mistiness.

Beautiful was the temple, but there was that in the center of the great hall that struck me literally speechless! In size it was larger than I, perhaps forty feet from the smooth, cool greenness of the floor to the tip of the fitted tiara, a wonderful, majestic figure, surely equal to the best of the work of the great sculptor Phidias. There in the air grew, rising above the sea-green paving, it seemed alive and almost holy. Our voices, our very thoughts were hushed by its grand, awesome presence. Truly, I felt in that pagan temple more of that great universal religion, necessary and inevitable as Time, than I have before, or since, in any house of worship on earth. Doc, too, felt it, for I saw him half-stumble, then stiffen, head back, and expand. Put it for the helmet I should have heard the awed hiss of his indrawn breath. I lowered my head, but I disbelieving the evidence of my eye, then looked again.

The level green of the floor rose smoothly up, twice a man's height, into a toppling tottering peak, a great billowing wave of stone so nearly like sea water that I half expected it to break and come thundering down, deluging us. From its highest crest, crusting forth into the open air, sprang a triple team of winged horses, harnessed with thin gold chains to a golden chariot,



alt submerged in the breaking sea. Of spotless white marble they were, with manes and tails and hair curled, strutting wings of tooled gold. steeds of the very gods, freeing themselves from the clinging waters of Earth and coursing straight upward into heaven, into infinity. Never do I wish to see such horses again! I could not stand it.

In the chariot, one hand grasping loosely the golden reins, the other resting high in exultation a trident of gold, stood the colossal figure of a man, a god, as majestic and serene as the roses were, and like them filled with the spirit and exuberance of Life itself. His feet were spread wide apart, his massive limbs and chest with their rolling muscles were bared by the single snowy garment that swept back in the wind of his passing. His golden beard and long yellow locks of hair-curved hair, whipped back in the tempest that gripped him, and against which he braced himself. And in his calm face and far-gazing eyes was, perhaps, a little of pity and of farewell, aside from the great pace and majesty and expectation.

Here and there, buried in the cresting wave, clinging to the smooth black form of dolphins, were white and gold forms, female forms, nereids bidding farewell to their master. There was sadness, great sadness in the faces turned toward that great central form, but there was also hope, hope and a little of the vision, the expectation, that lay in the serene eyes of the sea-god, leaving his children, his kingdom, forever, answering the call of Olympus.

Doc's helmet was off now, dropped and forgotten, as he stood before a tablet of the radiant metal that rose to the height of a man before the mighty group. I heard muttering, half to himself, half to me, to the world:

*"These be the laus of Poseidon, given unto the children of Atlas in the beginning, erected by His will in this, His temple, in Yzdial, first city of the Underworld, fifth city of Atlantis after the transformation by the wrath of Zeus! Look ye, O sons of Atlas, and obey!"*

He was silent, then. "After the transformation? Well, queerer things have happened, but to think—! It—it's wonderful!" He turned half toward me. "Jack, do you know your Plato? Have you read the '*Timæus*' and what there is of the '*Critias*'?"

"No, Doc, I'm afraid I haven't. Technical students were not supposed to need much culture, in college. It was above them."

"I suppose so. It is usually so. But I am glad that I have my share of culture, even though they called me 'the A.B.' back in the old days. But you have heard of Atlantis?"

"Oh, certainly. But that's a fable, isn't it?"

"A good many men think not, Jack. I am one. And, Jack, it seems that we are right."

"What do you mean, Doc? Has this anything to do with Atlantis? How could it? I thought Atlantis was on Earth."

'Wait! Wait! Let me tell you what Plato, what history tells us, first. Then you may draw your own conclusions.

"According to Plato, in the *'Critias'* and part of the *'Timaeus'*, there was an Atlantic Empire, an island empire that extended from Egypt to 'the continent beyond the Western Sea'—America it would seem. Approximately eleven thousand years ago they waged war on an alliance of little Mediterranean states, and were defeated, somehow, despite their power. Shortly afterward the islands, where the capital was located, disappeared, swallowed by the sea, Plato says. In the *'Critias'* he meant to give the entire story in detail, but after a description of the island continent of Atlantis, and of the metropolis, he breaks off, just as a council of the gods has been called by Zeus to arrange the annihilation of Atlantis. The *'Critias'* is but a fragment, but many years ago I thought I had found its other portion. The experts said not. They should know.

"My manuscript told of Poseidon's defense of his children, of the anger of Zeus at their war with the Greeks, his own children. They had strange, new weapons that slew at a distance as did the thunderbolts of Zeus, and the god was jealous. So it was that Zeus smote Atlantis with his own thunderbolts and turned the weapons of the Atlantides upon their own metropolis, 'and it became as if it had not been, and the god Poseidon buried the grave of Atlantis with his waves.' The Athenians easily overcame the advance guard of slaves, who did not have the annihilating weapon, and the people as a whole ascribed the destruction of Atlantis to an earthquake and tidal wave, which, in truth, were caused by the disappearance of the island. Only the priests, and a few of the rulers and historians, knew the truth.

"Jack, the *'Critias'* speaks of an unknown, immensely valuable metal, orichalcum, 'that has a fiery resplendence'. We know not such metals. The classical dictionaries call it brass, but it would seem to be luminescent, even in the daylight. Many, some, think it a radioactive element or alloy, but there is no evidence, on Earth, of a deposit of radioactive material such as Plato indicates, and we have no samples. So the classical students label it brass, even though Plato definitely marks the distinction in his description of the city!

"Plato describes Atlantis fully. It was a zoned island, with a great central metropolis built on a hill or mountain. He describes the temple of Poseidon, describes the walls about the zones, and, Jack, *it is a description of the city*, except that the city is zoned instead of the island!"

"Doc! Why—! But—! You mean—!"

"I mean that this is Atlantis!"

"But how can that be? How did it get here? They were mere savages eleven thousand years ago."

"Plato doesn't think so. And they had orichalcum. Jack, I think that someone, some priest, discovered the principle of our resonator, built one, a huge one, perhaps as a weapon, perhaps merely because the tendencies of



Man seem to run to extremes in size, and what it is, at Atlantis here? It may have been an accident, or, which is more likely, he may have been a priest of Zeus, a fanatic, who considered that Zeus had given him the secret of the divine thunderbolts in order that the dissolute, warring city might be annihilated. The transported island left a huge pit in the earth, a pit which the ocean filled, and which closed, submerging the rest of the island, when the sea-water struck the hot rock on the bottom. That was the tidal wave and earthquake that devastated the Mediterranean. 'Poseidon buried the grave of Atlantis with his waves.'

They came out somewhere in this world, Jack, all but about two hundred feet being above the sea. It would be the farm lands and the slum district that were submerged. They colonized the upper world, the surface of the planet. They grew crowded, found little land, only the hard black rock of the plateau. With their resonator, if it survived, or with some other tool of the sort, they bored through to this inner world. Their scientists would have known that it was here. Maybe they found a natural passage somewhere. At any rate, they built the ventilators, and this and other cities, copying the zoning and architecture of the old island, perhaps a myth by a w, and making the ventilating system automatic, controlled by some strange property of orichalcum and of that crystal, to emit the singing flame as well as light, the flame acting as a governor as I first suggested. It is a radioactive and electrical phenomenon, I feel sure.

For a long time they lived happily. Probably they were able to raise food under the artificial light, or in greenhouses. Their science would care for that. Then, before their last orichalcum was used up, they made the inner world unlined, automatic, and settled down to the business of living. We shall know more when I have seen their library, for the script is much like old Phoenician. The library will be intact, for one of their laws makes desecration of the library punishable by death. Evidently it was closely connected with the temple, and hence holy. Then something happened, I cannot guess what, and the fungus swallowed up their world. Perhaps they were entirely blotted out. Perhaps they escaped to some other cavern, some other world even. Time may tell. We have a good deal to do, here, and in other cities. Now let us take a bit of rest somewhere and then plan for the future."

As we turned to leave, I chanced to look up. There, midway to the mirrored ceiling, was a little balcony of black marble, over the gate. With a word to Doc, I pressed the control and floated up toward it. Doc, seeing my purpose, followed.

There was little to see, but it told a great deal, more than we could have hoped. On the floor of the balcony was a square, box-like contrivance, with an extension and a lens. It turned out to be what it seemed, a camera. Beside it was a pitiful little pile of grey dust, all that remained of the cameraman.

While Doc examined the camera I went alone down the narrow passageway that led off from the balcony. It was slightly, but after traversing a rather short flight of steps I came upon a great room built into the side of the building between the inner dome and the carved roof of the exterior. Through the crystal ceiling the light from the sphere above shone brightly, lighting the whole room brightly, though similar spheres, unlighted, were recessed at intervals throughout its annular length. All the way around the room it extended, with passageways extending up and down into other parts of the building and of the city. Everywhere were tables of strongly bound manuscripts and parchment rolls, while one entire section of hundreds of shelves contained roll upon roll of film, almost exactly like our own moving picture film, but metallic and very thin. Leading from this section, a broad stair opened into a darkened room in the very peak of the cone, filled with small booths capable of being connected with each other, so as to accommodate a party. Each booth was provided with a projection apparatus and a small and a large screen, the latter probably used when two or more booths were to need for a number of spectators. It was the library of the priests, and, as we later found, of the nobles of the marble zone.

I hurried back to Doc, to find him on his way to look for me. He carried the camera and a roll of film like that in the library.

"Look for a projector," he called, as he saw me. "This film won't need developing, and I think we'll see something interesting if we run it off."

"I've found one," I replied, "and what is more, I've loaned the library. Come on, I want to see what you have."

Alas for my hopes! Doc had to explore the library before we went a step farther, and then he insisted upon taking apart a camera and a projector to show how the things worked. As he explained it, light and sound activated a sort of ray which in turn produced an indelible impression on a paper thin metal strip. The film needed no developing and was naturally far more durable than our own films. The frequency of exposure was almost doubled, so that every slightest motion and undertone was recorded faithfully. In the projector, a second scanning ray controlled a sort of microphone apparatus as well as a battery of tubes of different frequencies which produced fluorescence of various colors on an electro-chemically treated screen. Those are the fundamentals only, technically there was a great deal more to the matter than would appear at first sight, especially in the projector.

We settled down in the rather comfortable mesh seats of the booth, while Doc put in the two reels that he had found in the camera. Alone, each was a perfect record of the type of our own moving pictures. Together, there was a decided effect of depth, due to a queer interference-phenomenon, peculiar to the special arrangement of treated screen and tubes, that made the result startlingly real. Part of the film, which had not been exposed, Doc had run off, after leaving a small gap in sections of the building as it now



was and in a panorama of the city. Apparently I had spent almost as much time in the library as he had later, after I told him of my find.

The first scenes showed a city like that in which we were, but a larger one—nearly twenty miles across. It was the New York of Atlantis. Queer one-wheeled cars and a few four-wheeled ones ran here and there along the innamed roadways. Acro-cars, much like our own, fitted back and forth over the zones, rising and descending vertically to the house tops. The view was a panorama, taken from an acro. We were able to distinguish the people on nearby cars, though we could not see clearly those that thronged the streets. They were tall, with fair complexion, probably due to continued underground life during several centuries.

Then, even as we looked, the city was gone! In its place gaped an enormous pit, ten miles across, cutting up through the heart of the city. On one side the terraces were intact up to the third zone, where toppling buildings were falling, crumbling, dropping down into the dust of the disintegrated planet! On the other side the hole extended for over a mile out into the plain, where fields of grain lay flat under the force of the rising wind. Seen from above, it was curiously like an eclipse, a huge black shadow cut from the varicolored disk of the city. Our acro dropped dizzily, sucked down by a great current of air that rushed madly down into the gigantic pit!

Just in time it was checked, and hovered over a sphere on the intact side of the city. Everywhere people were scampering to and fro like frightened ants, some rushing to the gates, some toward the pit where the cyclonic wind was crumpling the marble palaces of the aristocrats into a battered chaos! I wondered what was holding the acro, but I could not tell. Perhaps it was some force from the sphere. Everywhere else, everything—acros, cars, people were being sucked down into that great black maw by the irresistible wind!

We moved nearer and higher, above a second sphere. From here we looked directly into the pit, saw how it cuts its way down through the ordered heart of the city, down through level after level of great, dim-lit caverns, where throbbing machines sounded above the frenzied scream of the wind and the piping shouts of the people, where huge branching tube-systems of pneumatic railways ran out in all directions, where the vitals of the city were laid bare. Our acro was weakening now, its broad planes and undercarriage swept away by the tempest. Again the force of the sphere weakened, and we hurtled forward and down! The roar of machinery swelled to a shattering clamor, faded, disappeared. We were falling, ever faster and faster, between great encircling walls of the glossy black rock that seemed to make up almost all of this planet, falling in near silence, for the voice of the wind was but a droning, sobbing wail. The pit's walls sloped slowly inward, forming a cone whose height or, rather, depth must have been many miles. It was as if someone thrust a stick through a snowbank

and twisted it, boring out a mighty hole through which the snow castles of a race of children were falling eternally in flakes of snow and ruin.

Above, past the vainly whirling helicopter blades, the bore of the pit ran up to the rapidly disappearing opening dimly lit with a rosy light, where the world lay dying. Then it had gone, and for a long time we lay in a dull twilight, faded with the flashing of falling lights. At last, below, miles away, another dim light brightened, a different light, pale and phosphorescent with something of the hue of the Indian Pipe that one finds growing in slowly rotting woodlands. There lay another world, a world where the thing that had cleft the city had originated. What was it like? What Things lived there that had planned this destruction of the upper world? We forgot, Doc and I, that we were but onlookers. The crew of the aero could have felt no more strongly the horror of the moment, and the awful high-pitched wonder of it set our nerves on edge.

For at least an hour we fell, the camera seemingly acting automatically, while the dead white light swelled from a pinprick to a gleaming eye in the darkness, and the rosy twilight faded around us. Then, of a sudden, the wind ceased and the little aero was whirled here and there like a bit of fluff down in the maelstrom of the winds! The Things below had closed the opening through which air was being sucked into their airless or highly rarified world. Like a chip in a torrent we were tossed helplessly, the voice of the winds once more an exulting shriek, until at last the black wall span close, there was a rending of metal and crystal, and we were tumbling dizzily down toward the pale white light!

Exploring aëros must have found the camera there, lying amid the debris of the upper world upon the vast disk of pure crystal, half a mile across, that filled the bottom of the hole, found it and brought it back to have its film run off by another aero-crew. For after one short, vague glimpse of a heaving sea of billowing luminous waters, and a wilderness of jagged black rock, smeared with red lichens, and covered with the crushed remnants of a once mighty city, there was blackness, blackness that opened on another scene.

It was the city again, the shattered, torn remains of the once glorious metropolis, with that great gaping pit staring at us like a dead sunken eye. The roads that led from the four outer gates were thronged with human beings, four broad living rivers of writhing color stretching out over the level plain between matted fields of pale green grain. Cars, pedestrians, even crude man-drawn carts heaped with furniture and provender, all passing endlessly on, ever away from the city, the homes forever lost to them. We were in a closed aero now, one of myriads that thronged the air or hovered over the roads, watching. Higher still, in the traffic lanes, were mighty commercial ships, filled with freight and packed with staring, frantic humanity. Here and there, traveling in little groups or long drawn out ribbons were the private aëros. Apparently ours was a news-aero, filming the



hordes of the peoples of Atlantis from their demolished capital, once the fairest city of all their empire.

What that I could express the emotion that we felt as we watched that tragic flow of homeless people out of the shattered beauty of that great city. Some who have also seen, have felt it out not as we did with the memory of the blasted city of grey dust fresh before us. Details stand out in my mind, quickly caught snatches as the aero hung low over the road or slowly moved along it. I see them again: the little ragged child, dressed in the blue of the poor, running blindly along behind an old man of the aristocracy, who clutched to his breast his precious scrolls that dropped one by one from his weakening grasp; the delicate vase, a miracle in rose and ivory, lying by the wayside unharmed by the trampling feet that thundered all about it, the tiny, downy mate of a duckling crying pitifully, tottering on and on along the harsh stone of the road, stumbling, falling, beating with its little featherless wings in a vain effort to fly, clamoring with its feeble voice, beating at the broken glass and twisted metal, undertoot with its feeble, bleeding webs until a great foot came down upon it and mashed it into a tiny mat of blood and golden down! There were more, many more like that, but of them all the struggling duckling stands out for me for I have raised ducks and could feel with it.

For the last time the screen was filled with light. We were gazing from the little balcony into the great temple. It was filled with a frantic, maddening press of men and women, trampling each other down in mad terror. They thronged upon the great statue of Poseidon, clutching at it with pleading faces, begging for goodness, salvation, beating down the priests and guards who strove to drive them back! A figure clothed in flowing robes of green and gold appeared in their midst—the high priest. He raised his hands, spoke in a low, clear voice. As by magic the throng bowed its head and on rang that bell-like voice, reassuring, consoling, even as the first wisps of swirling grey appeared in the open doorway. He stopped, and all the multitude broke into song, a slow stirring chant that filled all the temple. Louder and louder, clearer and clearer it rolled to our ears, crowning out the cries of agony as the outer ranks melted and were gone. Like fire the malignant fungus ate its way through the praying throng, licking out tongues of sulphur or purple to pull down a tall youth or a feeble old woman, sending up twisting scarlet tentacles and wormlike arms of white! The cries drowned out the hymn now, but none stirred in fear. Fearless the tall figure beneath the golden statue gazed out over the dwindling sea of bent heads, as his strong clear voice sang on, leading, promising. Then he too was gone, and a thin, faint wisp drifted up toward the balcony. The screen toppled and the screen went black. Doc stopped the projector. We had no time to see again the grey desolation that lay over the city without.

For about a month we explored Yzerai—the "City of Heaven" the old Atlantides called it, for of all the two hundred cities or city states of the Underworld, Yzerai was first, in beauty as in chronological precedence. One

city only, the capital of the empire, had a temple of Poseidon more lovely, but of that we saw only pictures. For Luda, their capital, was the scene of the great destruction. We carefully removed the library, the contents of the Museum of Nature and Art, and the scrolls from the Amphitheater of Law, giving to the upper world and stored them just within the great gates, together with a great many scientific devices which we found in the dim vaults beneath the city. Incidentally, Doc sent back a large sample of the fungus spores with the other things when the time came. We did not send them at once, for one of us must be there to receive them, and we had no intention of returning as yet. I do not know why, but I seemed to have a queer feeling that when we had once quit that other world, Poseidon, the Atlanteans called it, we should not return. There was then no good reason for this, but—we have not. And we do not intend to.

Among other things, we had found hundreds of aeros on every level, aeros of varied type and mechanism. The smaller ones we used to transport our specimens to the ventilator, for only these long, narrow machines could pass through the door of the bronze cup at the shaft-bottom. Five of these, each loaded with orichalcum we left with the other things. A sixth, an express aero too large to pass through the opening, we used later. It was long, cigar-shaped, with a crystal-enclosed control room and observation chambers in the front and sides of the streamlined bronze hull. By means of the powerful orichalcum motors, using a sort of atomic energy, it was able to attain terrific speeds. We have done a thousand miles an hour in it, here on earth, where we were able to bring it after we found that the converging ray from the Underworld had also blasted the roof of the upper cavern, above Luda, and opened a passage to the surface of the planet. It is capable of more.

Our work over, we started in the aero for Luda, about five hundred miles away, the maps showed. Using low speeds, we arrived in an hour and a half. There lay the dead city, buried in the malignant grey dust, there the gaping black pit, cutting through the vitals of the city into the unknown heart of the planet. Luda seemed bathed in a halo of green, as we approached it, for the light of the green sun poured through the riven roof in a great shaft of emerald light. We did not stop to examine the ruins, but flew straight to the pit and dropped down into the darkness, the control room revolving with us as the ship's nose dipped.

We went very slowly on our way down, so that the trip of a little over one hundred miles took over an hour. Then we slowed up and settled among the débris on the great crystal door that closed the narrow bottom of the pit. Through it we could see a pale white sea lapping at a craggy shore. Above the harsh black beach rose a ragged plateau, covered with ugly blotches of the vivid red lichens that grew everywhere in this strange, unfriendly world in the planet's depths. There was no more. Evidently the Things whatever they might be, had carried away the débris for examina-



tion and I sealed the pit lest the inflow of air consume the vegetation of the inner world. It would seem that any plan of conquest had been abandoned.

For a while we wondered how we were to get through without breaking the crystal, and spreading the alarm as the upper air rushed in. Then Doc discovered a sort of narrow air lock in the pit's side, through which a single person could reach the inner world. Alone he went through, and returned alone. Beneath was the mechanism that moved the valve and he thought that he could operate it by himself, if I would protect the aero. So, setting our chronometers, we went to our posts. The seconds ticked off, slowly, slowly. Then, with a rush, the disk swung down and I found myself battling a screaming tempest that hurled me down, down into the pit. The sea engulfed me. But the aero was watertight and airtight, and when I hobbled to the surface, the disk was closed, the wind had stopped, and Doc was dropping swiftly toward me. I opened the hatch quickly and soon we were speeding over the strange landscape of this innermost world, with Doc at the controls.

Bordering the pale sea, and extending for perhaps twenty miles back from its edge was the rocky waste, black and ragged, stained everywhere with the red lichen like great clots of drying blood. Wherever there were crevices in which water settled a yellow scum formed at its edge be it in motion or stagnant, sending out twisting arms into the grey, dead pools and the odoury phosphorescing rivulets in search of some food or other. I know not what. Other than the Things, we saw but one creature in that inner world that was not plainly of the vegetable kingdom. It was a world of strange plants and plant forms, adapted by the radioactive nature of the soil and water to exist upon the few thin gases of its air, or to live parasitically on one another.

Beyond the mountainous region in which we found ourselves, the land sloped down on all sides to a strange, unwholesome forest that filled most of the inner world. Indeed, almost all of the land that we saw, with the exception of the narrow rim of low mountains, was below the level of the white sea. Seepage fed the pools of the hot, fetid lowlands and dense clouds of vapor rose from the many swamps. For a while we hung over it, seeking a clue to the Things, then skirted the edge of the smooth cliffs that marked the edge of the mountains. The vegetation of the place was utterly unnatural and nauseating. Thrusting out of the steaming scum covered pools were great tree-shapes with writhing, moving roots, and having smooth trunks like an eel's body. There was no foliage, but from the top of the trunk sprang a mass of slimy tentacular branches terminating in cup-like organs of a smoky orange, that contrasted strongly with the deathly white of the trunk and branches. From these hung little clusters of pale yellow fingers, lax or twisting hungrily. As we watched, a long branch darted down into the water near a root, then rose, the tentacles clutching the body of a small reptile, legless, with great white eyes, crimson gill organs and a

the black body ending in a flat tail. A few moments later, on the shore, we found one, also dead and examined it. It took certain gases direct from the air, then used them over and over again by running them through the radioactive water until they could be purified no more. We turned from the sight of the carnivorous plant devouring its prey. The crushed, pulpy form, the dripping juices, the eagerly writhing yellow scum—all sickened us. Was this the sole life of this inner world?

As if in answer to our question a gap appeared in the cliffs, opening into a huge amphitheater beyond. Its floor was smooth and black, and in its center, some ten miles from us, towered a great black city, a coiled city like Yzdra! and Luda. On its great outer walls, in its streets, was no sign of life, but between us and it rose a thin barrage of pale blue flame, rising sheer to the lowering ceiling of luminous clouds that shed a ghastly white gleam over the entire scene. Doc pointed below.

A gate had once closed the gap in the cliffs, but now it was shorn through as if it had been wax, scared clean, with no clue as to its destruction save a slightly billowing layer of rock that covered the otherwise smooth floor. It had been melted! On the side toward the swamp a thin ribbon of orichalcum had stretched across the pass, the source of the blue barrage, but now it, too, was twisted and fused. Here and there lay a blackened, distorted body, all that was left of the warders.

"Atlantides," said Doc. "Apparently they came down here, those who survived, to avenge the death of their race. They built a city, a stronghold from which to attack the Things that had exterminated their race. They could live here with respirators, as you can see from the bodies. They warred against the Things, perhaps they were very nearly successful, but finally their hiding place was found and attacked, their barriers broken down, their last stronghold shattered. I do not understand how that barrage was retained after their destruction. Perhaps it is automatic. But —"

"Doc! Look!" I shouted. "It's happening now! They're still there!"

Extending from the city walls for several miles beyond the wall of flame, a sheet of pure white was hiding the black rock. With the binoculars we could see that tiny jets were spraying the rock with white enamel. And now, revealed in relief against the white, a cloud of vapor appeared, intensely black, surrounding the city. It seemed to be stirring slowly within itself, though we could see it only as a silhouette, to be moving uneasily to and fro as if it were waiting impatiently for something. Now, suddenly, the ring thinned. Opposite us the vapor flowed out from the main body in a single great cloud that took a spherical shape, then sped to the barrage, tried it, flowed swiftly around its circumference, testing and trying all its surface. A smaller mass detached itself and returned to the main body. In response, the line thinned again, and the great sphere was doubled in size, reinforced. Off to the right of our position it formed a steep truncated cone, from which tiny darting wisps of black mist stretched forth to play over the face of the wall of flame. Now they returned, went forth again expor-



g a single spot midway of its height return once more. The core shortened, cracked to a globe supported by a thin stem, sent forth the little black fingers yet again, altered its position a bit, then hung motionless. A sort of breathlessness, a nervous and electrical tension began to build up around us. I could feel it, sense its purposeful unease even at our distance. The whole affair was unreal and horrible. What was this vapor that seemed to move of itself? What controlled it? What was its use—a poison gas, a smoke screen, what? I turned to where Doc had been, but he was gone. Then he appeared again, suddenly, at my side.

"Jack, try the resonator," he said. "Watch that vapor out there."

I obeyed. The city, the plain, the ship—all vanished in the familiar play of vivid color as I shifted slowly through the vibrations. But that rolling cloud of gas showed no tint nor faintest color tinge. It remained black, absolutely black. Reversing the controls, I returned.

"Doc, what is it?" I asked. "It's absolutely colorless, but that isn't all. It seems almost alive."

"It is alive, Jack. That is no mere gas cloud, no radio-controlled weapon. It is a living, intelligent entity like ourselves like the Atlantides, perhaps superior to us. What are its properties, its powers? I cannot tell, for it is entirely lifeless. But this creature of colorless vapor is the Thing that destroyed Atlantis. It is the unnatural enemy that the last of the Atlantides are combating, that may at last exterminate them. We are powerless to help them, Jack. We can take the offensive, with our resonators, but we have no means of defending ourselves. No, we must watch from a safe place while the Atlantides meet their fate, for it is our duty to live and warn the world that this Thing exists. Science demands it."

"Yes, we must return unharmed, I suppose; we must take no needless risks. But it is hard to see human beings like ourselves slaughtered by a Thing like that, while we stand safely aside, even though we know that any aid would be useless. It is hard always to be the scientist, Doc."

"It is hard, Jack. I know it as well as any. But we have chosen to set aside personal interests for the good of our race, and we must abide by our choice. A general may not lead his troops, Jack, he must remain in safety, even though they be dying in thousands. But look, it is going to attack."

The great black sphere on its narrow base had contracted until it was but half its former size. Now it began to spin slowly, ever contracting. A narrow black tether ran from the base to the thin ring that surrounded the city, a cable for communication and transfer of power, energy. This, too, was growing snaker, moving in, while the globe whirled faster and faster. The tension in the atmosphere grew intolerable. Then of a sudden the strain broke, the small black globe sprang in an instant to its former size, then condensed once more, as a ball of scarlet, opalescent flame took form in its heart, and grew until the black globe was gone and the circling ring had waned to a narrow thread.

Now this in turn began to contract until it resembled a huge opal lying on a pedestal of ebony and velvet. Again the atmosphere grew tense to the breaking point. And now my brain began to throb in unison with the pulsing orb of light from which sprang thin tongues of glowing red flame that struck the base wall of the barrage and sank into it. Faster and faster the living gem swelled and fell, faster and faster the bombardment of light battered the quivering wall. Now it no longer sank in at once but spread and cascaded over the quivering surface, like devouring flame in a desperate battle of light. Faster, ever faster those rosy hammers beat at the azure wall until at last it became a seething vortex of purple fire that swirled and canceled, then died as a crimson lance struck full upon the unprotected band of the dam and blasted it in a chaotic mountain of golden glory. In over the fallen flame-wall flowed the hosts of the Things, armed with hundreds of tiny opals that had been born from the great gem of the battle. An aero rose above the doomed city, melted and fell, blazing beneath the caress of a flame tongue. We could no longer see the black vapors, for they were invisible against the walls of the city, but we could see the myriad little gems of opalescence, darting their tiny, devil's flame tongues, as they flowed in a great wave over the city, fusing it into a dead black mound of cold rock, rock upon which a white frost was forming as the Things sucked from it its every drop of energy. As the little lights flashed out, and the great cloud of black vapor rolled toward us, Doc put the aero about and we floated out toward the swamp. Then, with a cry of alarm, he sent the ship at full speed out over the writhing tree tops. Startled, I looked back. *The Things had seen us.*

Down the narrow gorge and over the steaming waters of the swamp sped the great merciless cloud, crowned with a single mighty ball of light. Before it straight out into the marsh, stretched a broad lane of blackened vegetation and boiling waters cut straight through the heart of the living forest by the darting flames that strove to strike us down. Then it was left behind, and Doc slackened our awful pace, for it would not do to miss the opening of the pit and be forever trapped in the wilderness of this inner world. Before we had skirted the edge of the forest; now we were cutting straight across it to the spot, somewhere on the other side where lay the crystal valve and safety. More than three hundred miles an hour we dared not attempt and the black cloud, a blot against the pale swamp, was gaining on us at an incredible speed.

To the left the trees gave way to a wilderness of giant fungi, scarlet and purple and bilious yellow, that covered all the ground with its huge heaps of rotting color and distorted vivid spires. Above it hung the grey spore clouds that had brought destruction upon the upper world. And in the very heart of this Devil's garden rose the Crimson City, the city of the Things. We saw little of it as we hurtled far above and to one side, but we



was enough to make us wonder at the strange beauty of this fairy city of devils.

Spire on spire it rose into the thin air, over a mile from its base to the topmost pinnacle. There were straight, slender pencils that rose unbroken to a swelling sphere top. There were twisted, spiral towers like a narwhal's tusk crowned with mushroom roofs and overhanging balconies. There were great squat pyramids with level tops crowned by a palaried awning. There were razes of sky flang columns, needle pointed, hang with golden arches and topped with golden spheres and ovals. There were bulging Oriental domes and peaked domes, somehow gone wrong. There were mad elin pinnacles that earth has never seen, a chaos of peak and spire and arch that rivaled the twisting tang in grotesque fantasy. And everywhere, blotting out the smooth walls of crimson marble, were the ugly, billowing vapors that were the Things. Strange that beauty and evil can be so associated.

Now, Doc had handed me the two spire resonators with his own and motioned me to the hatchway. I caught his purpose immediately. Soon we were speeding above the rocky cliffs between sea and jungle, and the combined beams of the resonators were biting deep into the rough rocks, cutting a great gash straight through the heart of the mountains, through and out into the sea. Then the chasm was the path of a raging torrent that fell relentlessly upon the swampy forests and the beautiful crimson city of the Tarangs, carrying them deep beneath the wan, white waters. Submerged against the tumbling flood I could see the black cloud that hesitated, then sped on in frenzy, the opalescent sphere gleaming balefully at the crest of the inky wave.

Then the crystal valve was open, blasted by my resonator, and we were struggling again in the maelstrom of the winds as the pressing atmosphere of the upper worlds rushed down to destroy the smothering hue of the planet's core. The opalescent globe hung for an instant in the clutch of the winds, then hurtled against the rocky floor, to burst in a deluge of dazzling white flame that cascaded over the rough crags, smoothing them into a stacking, level plain. Against the frothing white of the sea a single wisp of black tossed madly and was swept away.

At last the winds lulled, and we won through to the cold bareness of the Atlantes' dead world, stripped even of the softening death-dust by the winds that gave vengeance. Two resonators, their power supplied by the remaining globes of Luda, we left to guard the bottom of the pit. If they are able to affect the Things, the upper worlds are safe from those inky clouds until the crystal spheres of Luda cease to shine. If there are still Atlantes somewhere in the upper worlds, the dust is gone, and they may start anew to form a great empire on their strange green planet—an empire that is secure in the knowledge of its inhabitants that there are those within reach who will give aid if it be needed. If such have survived, it is not impossible that the future shall see the reappearance of Atlantis before the Gates of Hercules, for we left in the ruled library of

Yzdral the tale of our expedition and the secret of the resonator. Time may witness the extension of the empire of Man to the myriad universes of two systems or more, if they exist. But Poseidon, the planet of the Atlantides, will never again be visited by Doc or me. We have witnessed the destruction of the stronghold of the inner world. We have seen the inundated Crimson City.

We have seen the dead upper world, the world of Luda and Yzdral. We have seen enough!



# *The Man Who Never Grew Young*

*by Fritz Leiber, Jr.*

Our first thought on seeing this story's title was that it was an error, possibly the typesetter meant to print "Old" instead of "Young." But no, it was not an error. The title is correct and therein lies a story that defies easy classification. Is it science fiction or is it weird fiction? Is it past, present, or future? Is it allegory, fantasy, or just a tale told for the devil of it? As far as we know, the story has never appeared in any magazine and this is the first time it has appeared in a mass edition medium. Reading it will be a unique experience to all.

M

AOT is becoming restless. Often toward evening she trudges to where the black earth meets the yellow sand and stands looking across the desert until the wind starts.

But I sit with my back to the reed screen and watch the Nile.

It isn't just that she's growing young. She is wearying of the fields. She leaves their tilling to me and lavishes her attentions on the flock. Every day she takes the sheep and goats farther to pasture.

I have seen it coming for a long time. For generations the fields have been growing scarrier and less diligently irrigated. There seems to be more rain. The houses have become simpler, more walled tents. And every year some family gathers its flocks and wanders off west.

Why should I cling so tenaciously to these poor relics of civilization? I, who have seen king Cheops' men take down the Great Pyramid block by block and return it to the hills?

I often wonder why I never grow young. It is still as much a mystery to me as to the brown farmers who kneel in awe when I walk past.

I envy those who grow young. I yearn for the sloughing of wisdom and responsibility, the plunge into a period of love-making and breathless excitement, the carefree years before the end.

But I remain a bearded man of thirty odd, wearing the goatskin as I

once wore the doublet or the toga, always on the brink of that plunge yet never making it.

It seems to me that I have always been this way. Why, I cannot even remember my own disinterment, and everyone remembers that.

Maot is subtle. She does not ask for what she wants, but when she comes home at evening she sits far back from the fire and murmurs distracting fragments of song and rubs her eyelids with green pigment to make herself desirable to me and tries in every way to infect me with her restlessness. She tempts me from the hot work at midday and points out how hardy our sheep and goats are becoming.

There are no young men among us any more. All of them start for the desert with the approach of youth, or before. Even toothless scrawny patriarchs uncurl from their grave holes, and hardly pausing to refresh themselves with the food and drink dug up with them, collect their flocks and wives and hobble off into the west.

I remember the first disinterment I witnessed. It was in a country of smoke and machines and constant news. But what I am about to relate occurred in a backwater where there were still small farms and narrow roads and simple ways.

There were two old women named Flora and Helen. It could not have been more than a few years since their own disinterments, but those I cannot remember. I think I was some sort of nephew, but I cannot be sure.

They began to visit an old grave in the cemetery a half mile outside town. I remember the little bouquets of flowers they would bring back with them. Their plain, placid faces became troubled. I could see that grief was entering their lives.

The years passed. Their visits to the cemetery became more frequent. Accompanying them once, I noted that the worn inscription on the headstone was growing clearer and sharper, just as was happening to their own features. "John, loving husband of Flora. . . ."

Often Flora would sob through half the night and Helen went about with a set look on her face. Relatives came and spoke comforting words, but these seemed only to intensify their grief.

Finally the headstone grew brand new and the grass became tender green shoots which disappeared into the raw brown earth. As if these were the signs their obscure instincts had been awaiting. Flora and Helen mastered their grief and visited the minister and the mortician and the doctor and made certain arrangements.

On a cold autumn day, when the brown curled leaves were whirling up into the trees, the procession set out—the empty hearse, the dark silent attendants. At the cemetery we found a couple of men with shovels turning away abruptly from the newly opened grave. Then, while Flora and Helen wept bitterly and the minister spoke solemn words, a long narrow box was lifted from the grave and carried to the hearse.



At home the lid of the box was unscrewed and slid back, and we saw John, a waxen old man with a long life before him.

Next day, in obedience to what seemed an age-old ritual, they took him from the box, and the mortician undressed him and drew a pungent liquid from his veins and injected the red blood. Then they took him and laid him in bed. After a few hours of stony-eyed waiting, the blood began to work. He stirred and his first breath rattled in his throat. Flora sat down on the bed and strained him to her in a fearful embrace.

But he was very sick and in need of rest, so the doctor waved her from the room. I remember the look on her face as she closed the door.

I should have been happy too, but I seem to recall that I felt there was something unwholesome about the whole episode. Perhaps our first experiences of the great crises of life always affect us in some such fashion.

I love Maot. The hundreds I have loved before her in my wanderings down the world do not take away from the sincerity of my affection. I did not enter her life, or theirs, as lovers ordinarily do—from the grave or in the passion of some terrible quarrel. I am always the intruder.

Maot knows there is something strange about me. But she does not let that interfere with her efforts to make me do the thing she wants.

I love Maot and eventually I will accede to her desire. But first I will linger a while by the Nile and the mighty pageantry conjured up by its passage.

My first memories are always the most difficult and I struggle the hardest to interpret them. I have the feeling that if I could get back a little beyond them, a terrifying understanding would come to me. But I never seem able to make the necessary effort.

They begin without antecedent in cloud and turmoil, darkness and fear. I am a citizen of a great country far away, heedless and wearing ugly conforming clothing, but no different in age and appearance from today. The country is a hundred times bigger than Egypt, yet it is only one of many. All the peoples of the world are known to each other, and the world is round, not flat, and it floats in an endless immensity dotted with islands of suns, not confined under a star-speckled bowl.

Machines are everywhere, and news goes round the world like a shout, and desires are many. There is undreamed-of abundance, unrivaled opportunity. Yet men are not happy. They live in fear. The fear, if I recall rightly, is of a war that will engulf and perhaps destroy us all. It overhangs us like the dark.

The weapons they have ready for that war are terrible. Great engines that sail painless, not through the water but the air, halfway around the world to destroy some enemy city. Others that dart up beyond the air itself, to come in attacking from the stars. Poisoned clouds. Deadly motes of luminous dust.

But worst of all are the weapons that are only rumored.

For months that seem eonities we wait on the brink of that war. We

know that the mistakes have been made, the irrevocable steps taken, the last chances lost. We only await the event.

It would seem that there must have been some special reason for the extremity of our hopelessness and horror. As if there had been previous world-wide wars and we had struggled back from each, desperately promising ourselves that it would be the last. But of any such, I can remember nothing. I and the world might well have been created under the shadow of that catastrophe, in a universal disinterment.

The months wear on. Then, miraculously, unbelievably, the war begins to recede. The tension relaxes. The clouds lift. There is great activity, conferences and plans. Hopes for lasting peace ride high.

This does not last. In sudden holocaust, there arises an oppressor named Hitler. Odd, how that name should come back to me after these millennia. His armies fan out across the globe.

But their success is short-lived. They are driven back, and Hitler trails off into oblivion. In the end he is an obscure agitator, almost forgotten.

Another peace then, but neither does it last. Another war, less fierce than the preceding, and it too trails off into a quieter era.

And so on.

I sometimes think (I must hold on to this) that time once flowed in the opposite direction, and that, in revulsion from the ultimate war, it turned back upon itself and began to retrace its former course. That our present lives are only a return and an unwinding. A great retreat.

In that case time may turn again. We may have another chance to scale the barrier.

But no. . .

The thought has vanished in the rippling Nile.

Another family is leaving the valley today. All morning they have toiled up the sandy gorge. And now, returning perhaps for a last glimpse, to the verge of the yellow cliffs, they are outlined against the morning sky - upright specks for men, flat specks for animals.

Miaot watches beside me. But she makes no comment. She is sure of me.

The cliff is bare again. Soon they will have forgotten the Nile and its disturbing ghosts of memories.

All our life is a forgetting and a closing in. As the child is absorbed by its mother, so great thoughts are swallowed up in the mind of genius. At first they are everywhere. They environ us like the air. Then there is a narrowing in. Not all men know them. Then there comes one great man, and he takes them to himself, and they are a secret. There only remains the disturbing conviction that something worthy has vanished.

I have seen Shakespeare unwrite the great plays. I have watched Socrates unthink the great thoughts. I have heard Jesus unsay the great words.

There is an inscription in stone, and it seems eternal. Coming back centuries later I find it the same, only a little less worn, and I think that



it, at least, may endure. But some day a scribe comes and laboriously fills in the grooves until there is only blank stone.

Then only he knows what was written there. And as he grows young, that knowledge dies forever.

It is the same in all we do. Our houses grow new and we dismantle them and throw the materials inconspicuously away, in mine and quarry, forest and field. Our clothes grow new and we put them off. And we grow new and forget and blindly seek a mother.

All the people are gone now. Only I and Maot linger.

I had not realized it would come so soon. Now that we are near the end, Nature seems to hurry.

I suppose that there are other stragglers here and there along the Nile but I like to think that we are the last to see the vanishing fields, the last to look upon the river with some knowledge of what it once symbolized, before oblivion closes in.

Ours is a world in which lost causes conquer. After the second war of which I spoke, there was a long period of peace in my native country across the sea. There were among us at that time a primitive people called Indians, neglected and imposed upon and forced to live apart in unwanted areas. We gave no thought to these people. We would have laughed at anyone who told us they had power to hurt us.

But from somewhere a spark of rebellion appeared among them. They joined hands, armed themselves with bows and inferior guns, took the warpath against us.

We fought them in little unimportant wars that were never quite conclusive. They persisted, always returning to the fight, laying on ambushes for our men and wagons, harrying us continually, eventually making sizable inroads.

Yet we still considered them of such trifling importance that we found time to engage in a civil war among ourselves.

The issue of this war was sad. A dusky portion of our citizenry were enslaved and made to toil for us in house and field.

The Indians grew formidable. Step by step they drove us back across the wide midwestern rivers and plains, through the wooded mountains to eastward.

On the eastern coast we held for a while, chiefly by leaguings with a transatlantic island nation, to whom we surrendered our independence.

There was an enlightening occurrence. The enslaved Negroes were gathered together and crowded in ships and taken to the southern shores of this continent, and there liberated or given into the hands of warlike tribes who eventually released them.

But the pressure on the Indians, sporadically aided by foreign allies, increased city by city, town by town, settlement by settlement, we pulled up our stakes and took ship ourselves across the sea. Toward the end the Indians became strangely pacific, so that the last boatloads seemed to flee

not so much in physical fear as in supernatural terror of the green silent forests that had swallowed up their homes.

To the south the Aztecs took up their glass knives and flint edged swords and drove out the . . . I think they were called Spaniards.

In another century the whole western continent was forgotten, save for dim, haunting recollections.

Growing tyranny and ignorance, a constant contraction of frontiers, rebellions of the downtrodden, who in turn became oppressors—these constituted the next epoch of history.

Once I thought the tide had turned. A strong and orderly people, the Romans arose and put most of the diminished world under their sway.

But this stability proved transitory. Once again the governed rose against the governors. The Romans were driven back from England, from Egypt, from Gaul, from Asia, from Greece. Rising from barren fields came Carthage to contest successfully Rome's preeminence. The Romans took refuge in Rome, became unimportant, dwindled, were lost in a maze of migrations.

Their energizing thoughts flamed up for one glorious century in Athens, then ceased to carry weight.

After that, the decline continued at a steady pace. Never again was I deceived into thinking the trend had changed.

Except this one last time.

For a while she was stony and sand-drenched and dry, full of temples and towers, given to custom and calm, I thought Egypt would endure. The passage of almost changeless centuries encouraged me in this belief. I thought that if we had not reached the turning point, we had at least come to rest.

But the rains have come, the temples and towers and the scars in the cliffs, and the custom and calm have given way to the restless urges of the nomad.

If there is a turning point, it will not come until man is one with the beasts.

And Egypt must vanish like the rest.

To-morrow Maot and I set out. Our flock is gathered. Our tent is rolled. Maot is afire with youth. She is very loving.

It will be strange in the desert. And to be seen we will exchange our last and sweetest kiss and she will prattle to me childishly and I will look after her until we find her mother.

Or perhaps some day I will abandon her in the desert, and her mother will find her.

And I will go on.



# *The Man from the Moon*

*by Otis Adelbert Kline*

*The famous "Princess of Mars" novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs have achieved worldwide standing among readers of adventure stories and have inspired many authors to similar efforts. In our opinion, one of the most successful examples has been the "Planet of Pell" set of novels by the late Otis Adelbert Kline. There were six or seven titles in that series, taking place on our celestial neighbors, Venus, Luna, and Mars. In response to readers' requests, we are now reprinting for the first time that novelette of Kline's which may be said to be the keystone of these novels—the cosmic history of the interplanetary war that laid waste three worlds and set the stage for the adventures that were to thrill Kline's magazine and book audience.*

W

E STOOD on the eastern rim of Crater Moind—my friend Professor Thompson, the noted selenographer, and I. Dusky shadows lengthened and grew more intense in the great, deep basin before us, as the Sun, his face reddened as if from his day's exertions, sank slowly beyond the western rim.

Behind us, Alamo Edwards, the dude wrangler who had brought us out from Canyon Diabolo two weeks before, was dividing his time between the chuck wagon and our outdoor cookstove in the preparation of our evening meal, while our hobbled horses wandered about nearby, searching out clumps of edible vegetation.

"How is the story progressing, Jim?" asked the professor, referring to a half finished novel I had brought out with me to occupy my time with, while my friend pattered among the stones and rubble in the vicinity.

"I've reached an impasse—" I began.

"And so have I," rejoined my friend dejectedly, "but of the two, mine is far the worst, for yours is in an imaginary situation, while mine is real. You will eventually solve your problem by using your imagination, which has no fixed limitations. I can only solve mine by using my reason, which is limited to deductions from facts. If I do not find sufficient facts either to prove or disprove my theory, what have I? A hypothesis, ludicrously wob-

bling on one puny leg, neither able to stand erect among established scientific truths nor to fall to dissolution among the mistaken ideas of the past."

"What single, if weak, leg supports your theory that the craters of the moon were caused by meteorites?" I asked.

"You are standing on it," replied the professor. Then, seeing me look around in perplexity, he added: "Crater Mound is the only known Terrestrial formation that exactly resembles in shape the great ring mountains of the moon. If Crater Mound was caused by the impact of a gigantic meteorite with the earth, there is a strong probability that the numerous ringed craters of the moon were created in a like manner."

"But was it?" I asked.

"That is something I can neither prove nor disprove," he replied. "The evidence I have thus far discovered leads me to believe that many relatively small meteoric fragments have fallen here. But they could not have fallen singly, or by twos and threes to make this dent three quarters of a mile in diameter and more than four hundred feet below the surrounding earth level, to say nothing of throwing up the ring on which we now stand to a mean height of a hundred and fifty feet above the plain."

"Then how could they have fallen?"

"If this great earthen bowl was caused by them, they must have struck this plain in an immense cluster at least a third of a mile in diameter, probably more."

"In that case, what has become of the cluster?"

"Part of it is probably buried beneath the soil. Part of it, exposed to the air, would have been burned to a fine ash, having generated a terrific heat in its passage through the atmosphere and still having, before it cooled, an opportunity to unite with oxygen. There should, however, be an intermediary residue which I have been unable to find."

"Maybe it was carted off by prehistoric Americans for the metals it contained," I feebly ventured to suggest.

"Impossible as that statement may seem," said the professor, "there is a small amount of evidence in favor of it, for I have found a number of meteoric fragments miles from the rim of the crater. By Jove! We appear to have a visitor!"

He clapped his powerful binoculars to his eyes, and looking in the direction in which they pointed, I saw a tall, bent figure, apparently attired in a robe or gown, leaning on a long staff and carrying a bundle of poles under one arm, slowly ascending the slope opposite us.

"Seems to be a Chinaman," he said, passing the glasses to me. "What is your opinion?"

I looked and saw an undeniably Mongolian face, with slanting eyes, prominent cheek bones, and a long, thin moustache, the ends of which drooped at least four inches below the chin. The voluminous garments,



though badly tattered, were unquestionably Chinese, as was the cap with a button in the center, which surmounted the broad head.

"A Chinaman or an excellent makeup," I replied. "Wonder what he's doing out here in his native costume?"

Our speculations were interrupted by the canon supper call of Alamo from the camp behind us:

"Come an' get it, or I'll feed it to the coyotes."

"You go down and eat," said the professor. "I'm not hungry, anyway, and I want to stay here and watch this curious newcomer. Bring me a bacon and egg sandwich and a bottle of coffee when you have finished."

Knowing my friend's disposition—for once he had made up his mind, a fleet of tractors could not drag him from his purpose—I did not argue with him, but descended to the camp.

While Alamo grumbled about dudes that were too interested in rocks to come for their chow while it was hot, I finished my evening meal. Then, taking my binoculars, I carried his light snack to the professor as requested.

The last pink glow of the sun was fading in the west, and the moon was rising when I reached the top of the ridge.

"Sit down here beside me," whispered the professor. "Our visitor seems to be preparing for a religious ceremony of some sort, and I dislike disturbing him."

While my friendunched his sandwich and sipped his coffee, I used my binoculars to watch the Chinaman. He had erected four poles supporting four others which formed a square above a low, but topped rock near the center of the crater. Suspended from the horizontal poles by cords were many small objects which were apparently very light in weight, for they stirred like leaves in the breeze. A lighted taper stood in the center of the flat rock, which was surrounded by a ring of thin sticks that had been thrust into the ground. The Oriental was on his knees before the stone, immobile as the rock itself, his face turned in our direction.

"Seems to be keeping his eyes on us," I said.

"I think he is waiting for the moon to rise above the crater rim," replied the professor, once more applying his eyes to his oval binoculars.

My friend was right, for as soon as the thin sliver of moonlight entered the crater the kneeling figure was galvanized into action.

Bestowing into a singsong chant quite audible, if unattractively to me, the Oriental applied the flame of the taper to each of the thin sticks he had planted around the stone, all of which were soon glowing like burning punk. Then he stepped beneath one of the objects suspended from a horizontal pole, made a short speech in the direction of the moon, and lighted it with the taper. It burned out in a few seconds, casting a weird, yellow light over the scene. Stepping beneath the next suspended object he kindled in order, perched and lighted that object also. This one burned with a blue flame. He continued thus for several minutes until all the dangling objects had been consumed, each with a different colored flame. Then he extin-

gashed the ether and knelt once more before the stone, resuming his chant, and prostrating himself from time to time with his forehead touching the stone. The breeze, blowing in our direction, was laden with the sweet, new odor of burning spruce wood and musk.

A half hour passed with no change in the ceremony. Then the burning sticks winked out, one by one. When the last went dark, the kneeling man made a final prostration, then rose, took down his framework of poles, tucked them under his arm, and leaning heavily on his long staff departed toward the west.

"Show's over," I said. "Shall we go back to camp?"

"HARRY," replied my friend. "I'm going to follow him. In this bright moonlight it should be easy. By Jove! What has become of him? Why the fellow just now disappeared before my eyes!"

"Maybe he fell into a ditch," I hazarded.

"Ditch, riddlesticks!" snapped the professor. "I've explored every square foot of this crater and know there is no depression of any kind where he was walking."

"Eastern magic," I ventured. "Now you see it, now you don't."

"Rot! You stay here and watch the western slope with your binoculars. I'm going down to investigate."

I watched, while the professor tumbled hastily across the crater and frantically searched the vicinity of the place where he had declared the Celestial had disappeared. After a twenty minute hunt, he gave it up and came back.

"Queer," he panted as he came up beside me. "Deucedly queer. I couldn't find him nor hear of the fellow—not even the burnt ends of his moss socks. Must have taken everything with him."

We returned to camp, squatted beside the fire, and lighted our pipes.

Alamo had stacked the dishes, putting off to the last the one camp job he hated—washing them—and was picketing the horses. Suddenly we heard him sing out:

"Well, look who's here. Hello, Charlie. You wantee come along washee dishee, gettee all same plenty much chow?"

Looking up in surprise, I saw the tall, ragged Oriental who had disappeared so mysteriously a few moments before, coming toward us. He was still leaning on his long staff, but minus the poles he had previously carried.

The professor and I both leaped to our feet from places beside the fire.

The Chinaman paused and looked at Alamo in evident bewilderment.

"I beg a thousand pardons," he said in excellent English, "but your speech is quite unintelligible to me."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Alamo tilted his broad Stetson to one side and scratched his head in amazement.

By this time my excited friend had reached the side of our Celestial visitor.



"He was only inviting you to sup with us, in the patois of the West," explained the professor.

The Chinaman bowed gravely to Alamo.

"Your magnificent hospitality is duly appreciated," he said, "but I beg to be excused, as I may not partake of food in the presence of the mighty Moon." As he uttered the last word he extended his left hand toward the moon, then touched his forehead as if in salute. There was something majestic about his bearing that made one forget the tattered rags in which he was clad.

"We accept your excuse without question," said the professor, quickly. "Permit me to welcome you to our campfire circle."

Our guest bowed low, moved into the circle of fire light, and laying his staff on the ground, squatted before the fire. Then he took a long stemmed pipe with a small, brass bowl, from one of his capacious sleeves, and the professor and I both proffered our tobacco pouches.

"I'll use my own, with your indulgence," said our visitor, filling his pipe from a small lacquered box he carried. Before closing the box, he threw a pinch of tobacco into the fire, raised his left hand toward the moon, and uttered a few words unintelligible to me. Then, after touching his forehead, he lighted his pipe with the glowing end of a stick from the fire.

After puffing in meditative silence for a few minutes, he said:

"As I have thanksgiving devotions to perform, my time is limited. I will therefore, as briefly as possible, explain the reason for my visit, and convey to you the communication of the great one, whose humble messenger I am.

"Twenty years ago I was a Buddhist priest in T'ainfu. It was expected of every member of our order that at least once during his lifetime he should make a pilgrimage to a certain monastery in Tibet, there to perform mystic rites in a secret sanctuary, where a sacred stone of immemorable antiquity was kept. I made the pilgrimage, fully expecting to return to T'ainfu, as my brother priests had done and take up the duties of my humdrum existence there for the term of my natural life.

"There are things which I may tell you, and things which I may not disclose, so let me explain, briefly, that the whole course of my life was changed when first I viewed the sacred stone. It was graven with mystic characters, similar to, yet unlike Chinese writing. According to tradition, none but a living Buddha could decipher this sacred writing, which might not be transmitted to any of his followers, however great or wise.

"Now I have, from the days of my youth, made a study of our ancient writings, and had learned the meanings of many characters since wholly obsolete, as well as the former meanings of those whose significance had been entirely changed. I firmly believed, with my fellow priests, that none but the living Buddha might translate the writings on the stone. You may judge, therefore, of my surprise when I found myself able to translate several of the ideographs graven on its sacred surface. I instantly believed myself the true possessor of the *karma* of Buddha, and that the living Buddha of my order

was an impostor. On attempting to translate other characters, I found the majority of them unintelligible to me.

One of the requirements of my pilgrimage was that I was to spend four hours a day for a period of seven days alone on my knees before the sacred stone. A guard, posted outside the door, saw to it that but one pilgrim was admitted at a time. On the day following, I secreted writing materials in my clothing, and spent the time allotted to me on that day, and the five days following, in carefully copying the writing on the stone.

"I carried my prize away without detection, but did not return to T'ainfa. Instead, I wandered from monastery to monastery, from temple to temple, conversing with the learned men and reading the ancient records to which I, as a pilgrim priest, was usually given access without question. The task of translation, which had at first appeared easy, took me ten years to complete.

"When it was finished I knew that it had not been written by God, as was supposed, but by the first earthly ancestor of my race, and I found myself charged with a trust which appeared as difficult of fulfillment as the translation itself. The crater which you have been investigating was described to me, yet its location was unknown to the writer. I was charged to find it and to find you. It took me nine years to find the crater, during which time I visited thousands, none of which exactly fitted the description. It took me a year more to find you and to receive the sign."

"May I ask what sign you refer to?" inquired the professor.

"My illustrious ancestor, who charged me with the task of conveying his message to you, said in the writing that his spirit would be watching me from Magong. He prophesied that you would appear at this place, and when you did he would flash a brilliant signal to me from his Celestial abode."

"And you have the signal?"

"I have and do, for it is still visible. Look!" He pointed toward the full moon.

The professor looked, then raised his binoculars to his eyes and focused them.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "You have unusually sharp eyes. There is a brilliant, star-like light in the crater, Ar starchus. A rare occurrence too."

"I have studied Magong for many years," replied our guest, "and have trained my eyes to see things hidden from the sight of ordinary mortals. I could have used a telescope or binoculars, but for my purpose I have no need of them."

"Remarkable!" commented the professor. "And this light fulfills the prophecy?"

"To the letter. Permit me to deliver my message, therefore, and depart, for I have much to do before Magong veils her face once more."

Drawing a large, bulky envelope from his pocket, the Oriental arose and handed it to the professor with a profound bow.

Springing to his feet with alacrity, the professor accepted it with a bow as low and dignified as that of the donor.



"If you please," said our guest, "Use this message as you wish, for that is your privilege, but you will confer a favor on the illustrious sender and bring his greetings on yours, if and your descendants if you will use it to advance the knowledge of mankind."

"I will endeavor to do so," as you ask," replied the professor, "and thank you for it, and for the trust you have placed in me."

"Do not thank me," was the answer, accompanied by a significant gesture skyward. "Thank P'an-ku."

"I will, and do. May we not have the pleasure of your company tomorrow?"

"A thousand thanks, and as many regrets, but my task will have ended when Magong veils her face, and I am weary and would return to T'ai-jung. So farewell."

He took up his staff, and without a further word, stalked majestically out into the moonlight. The last we saw of him was when his tall, gaunt figure was silhouetted against the sky for a moment on the crater rim.

With trembling fingers the professor broke the seal of the envelope and drew therefrom a neatly written manuscript. It was in English, and he read it aloud to me, while Alamo snored lustily from the folds of his blanket several yards away.

With Professor Thompson's permission, I publish it here for the first time, making it clear at the outset, that while it seems to explain many matters which have puzzled our leading scientists for hundreds of years, and is not, in the light of our present knowledge, either susceptible of proof or refutation, we cannot vouch for its veracity.

### THE STORY OF P'AN-KU

Having attained the advanced age of two hundred and ninety-eight earthly years, and feeling the hands of San-mai, the devourer, grim messenger of the Supreme God, T'ien, ever closing tighter on my throat, slowly squeezing out my soul from the old shell of a body, I, P'an-ku, lord of thousands, founder of a new race, and last survivor of an old, have retired from my manifold duties and pleasures—the cradling of the affairs of my subjects, the company of my wife, my children, and my children's children, who will someday be as numerous as the stars of heaven—to write this history of my own people for the use to come who will have the intelligence and the desire to understand it.

For a million historical years, men of my race, I, united Magong when she was yet a planet among planets, a true, rotating sphere with her own light, toward earth, midway between the orbits of this planet and that of the terrible, devastating war world, Mars. For a part of those million historical years an ancestor of mine—P'an-ku—sat on the imperial throne of Magong and held dominion over all her lands and seas.

When I was born, Crown Prince of Magong, my people had reached an advanced stage of civilization, for much can be accomplished in a million historical years. For more than ten thousand years, Magong had been in con-

munition with Mars, the only other planet inhabited by intelligent beings. For over five thousand years, our interplanetary ships had visited their planet, and their ships had made friendly calls on Magong, carrying passengers, manufactured merchandise, and raw materials. A colony of the royal, white people, whose faces I wish we had never seen, was founded on one of our continents and treated with every friendly consideration by our rulers—that is, my ancestors. A colony of our stalwart yellow people had also settled on Mars, and had been received with every appearance of good will.

Before I was sixteen years of age I had learned to navigate an ether ship, and when I had demonstrated to my father's satisfaction that I was a thorough master of interplanetary navigation, he permitted me a leave of absence of two years for the purpose of visiting the inner planets—Earth, Venus and Mercury. This trip was mostly for my own education, as all three of the planets had been explored thousands of years before, and had subsequently been visited at regular intervals by our scientific expeditions for the purpose of studying the evolutionary changes taking place on them. Mercury had developed nothing but the most lowly vegetable organisms. Venus teemed with life, ranging from the microscopic, unicellular animalcules to gigantic, four-legged reptiles, which roamed through her great forests of fern and fungi, some of them feeding on these and other primordial thallophytic growths, some preying on these herbivora or on the lesser creatures coexistent with them on that planet. Some of them had evolved membranous wings, with which they flapped clumsily from place to place, but there were no birds or mammals. Among the plants, none flowered or bore fruit or seed. All reproduced by spores or spawn or by simple fission.

On the Earth, a higher order of evolution was in progress. Many of the plants, having developed specialized sexual organs, flowered and bore fruit. Birds forsook the ways and forms of their reptilian ancestors—evolved a thousand shapes and hues—cultivated gorgeous plumage and melodious voices. Mammals suckled and reared their young, and man, the greatest animal of the world, was slowly battling his way to world supremacy with crude weapons and implements of wood and stone.

On my return to Magong, after visiting the inner planets, I importuned my father to permit me to visit Jupiter. This he heartily refused to do. The trip, he said, was too long and dangerous for one of my years. Furthermore, only once, out of a thousand of our most skillful and experienced navigators, who had attempted the trip, had returned, to tell of it. I had to be content, hereafter, with several trips to Mars, where I, as Crown Prince of Magong, was always received with such pomp and splendor that I was sure I ought to be permitted to go incognito and range with the common people. But even this small pleasure was denied me.

At twenty-five, I was made commander in chief of Magong's interplanetary fleet. Shortly thereafter, trouble developed between my father and I and my Supreme Ruler of Mars. It seems that a number of Martians, jealous of the economic progress made by our colonists on that planet, had gone to



Lido Kan with tales of woe insisting that they be deported. So strong was the pressure they brought to bear on him, that he finally took the matter up with my father. The reply of my father was courteous, but firm. He insisted that if his people were to be exiled from Mars, the Martian colony must also leave Magong. Lido Kan argued that his people had created no disturbance on Magong, and no dissension among the subjects of my father, which was true enough, and my father naturally retorted that his subjects were too courteous to even think of bringing up such a matter.

One word led to another, and things went from bad to worse, until a group of Martians attacked and massacred the inhabitants of one of our settlements. My father instantly demanded an imperial apology from Lido Kan, complete punishment of the perpetrators of the crime, and indemnity for relatives of all the massacred people. Lido Kan delayed his reply for several days, but was eventually swayed by the jingoists of his realm, and replied that he would neither apologize, pay indemnity, nor punish any of his subjects, as my father had received fair and timely warning. While my father debated what to do in this crisis—for he had always been a man of peace—word came that an army of Martians had completely wiped out our colonies on that planet.

A short time thereafter, the commander of one of our large interplanetary passenger ships ether-waved me that the Martians would not permit him to leave port, and that several hundred of our ships were being held in a similar fashion. I immediately left Magong with a fleet of battleships, intending to demand their release or fight, but was met half way by a fleet of Martian warships.

The contest that ensued was short and disastrous. My fleet used the cold, energy decreasing green ray of condensation, which we had developed—the enemy fleet, the hot, energy-increasing red ray of dispersion. We had developed our inter-rotating green rays to such a degree that any substance touched by them would contract to less than one hundredth of its normal size with a corresponding increase in density. The toughest metals, under this ray, would become as brittle as egg shells and more dense than pure lead.

The effect of the red rays of the Martians was the opposite, but fully as devastating, as these rays, rotating in receding spirals, tore the atoms apart on contact making the heaviest metals less dense than the atmosphere in an instant. When a green ray met a red ray of equal intensity, they neutralized each other.

By superior maneuvering, I managed to wipe out the last Martian battleship when I had lost all but the flagship of my fleet. This had been badly crippled by a red ray, and after making temporary repairs, I limped sadly back to port.

On the face of my father, when I reported to him in the throne room that day, was a look sterner than any I had ever seen him wear.

"My son," he said "War is a terrible thing—the worst affliction that can come to humanity—but it is at hand and we must meet it like men. The Mar-

tians have made a start by wiping out our colonies and attacking our fleet. Now they are determined to eliminate us entirely from the solar system. At this very hour they are preparing to use their most terrific weapon of all against us."

"What weapon is that, O my father?" I asked.

"Come with me, my son, and I will show you."

He led me up to the great observatory on top of his palace. We passed through the general observation room, where a hundred enormous telescopes were in constant use—a thousand trained men observing, recording, and manipulating the instruments. Going into his private observation room, my father himself trained his huge telescope on a distant object. Then he called me to look. I saw what appeared to be a huge spiral of nebulous matter forming near Mars.

"They are clearing interplanetary lanes for the passage of a huge fleet," I said. "See, they are collecting all the meteoric bodies for millions of miles in all directions."

"They are doing more than that, my son," my father replied. "That matter condensing and projecting apparatus which they formerly used to clear the way for peaceful ships is going to be used for a horribly deadly purpose. Have you noticed *where* they are condensing the meteoric mass?"

"It seems to be on a line between Magong and Mars," I replied.

"It is. Have they ever condensed material in that position before? You know full well they have not. They have always concentrated it in a position where it could be projected out into space without harm to anyone."

"Why, Father, what do you mean?"

"I mean that as soon as that synthetic nebula reaches a sufficient degree of cohesion and solidity it will be projected at *us*!"

"What will it do? Will it burst our planet asunder? Will everyone be killed?"

"No. It is not large enough for that, but it can do incalculable damage, and if their aim is good and they are not stopped in some way, they can collect enough of such matter from the meteoric belts of the solar system to depopulate this planet."

"Can't we dodge them? What about the new gravity control plant?"

"The thing is still in the experimental stage. Besides, it is a terrible and a dangerous thing to disturb or attempt to change the orbit of Magong. Every body in the solar system is in perfect balance with every other body, and too great a change, even in the orbit of our own relatively small planet, may cause untold damage—some upset of the scheme of things, which we cannot possibly foresee. True, we have slightly perturbed the motion of Magong, just as an experiment, but it has been done cautiously, and always with a counter perturbation sufficient to bring it back to the proper place in its orbit."

Once more my father looked through the giant telescope.

"The projectile is formed and on the way," he said gravely. "Where it will strike no one can tell—not even those who are sending it. It may crush this



police, destroy this city. It may kill nobody or wipe out a million people. It may miss Magong entirely, but this is not probable. We are too large a target. Let us go below. There is nothing more we can learn here at present. I will show you the only efficient aggressive weapon to which I can turn at present. By this, and by the remaining planetary fleets under your command, the question of our very existence will be determined."

We descended to the main floor and entered a compression tube car, in which we were shot to one of the numerous physics laboratory stations of Magong. My father presented Wang Ho, the venerable chief scientist of the institution.

"Wang Ho," he said, "Is the atmosphere disintegration ray ready?"

"It is ready, your majesty," was the reply.

"Then transmit on Mars. They insist on war, so we will give it to them in earnest. They are determined to destroy the face of our planet, therefore let us remove the atmosphere from theirs."

"Your majesty is aware, I hope, that a continuous use of this ray will be suicidal. For every ten cubic parsecs of their atmosphere we send out into space, we also send out one cubic parsec of our own. If your majesty would wait, and have a number of these ray projectors made in portable size, they could be fastened to ether ships and used without destroying our own atmosphere."

"Unfortunately," replied my father, "we cannot wait. The war is on. It may be decided in a few days. Several weeks would be required to fit out ether ships with these ray projectors. No, we must fight now, or be forever beaten. Turn the ray on them, and keep it going as long as they are in range. Our other protecting stations will take up the duty, one by one, as the planet revolves on its axis."

He turned to me.

"My son," he said, "The entire war fleet of Magong is in your keeping. Save the fleet if you can, yourself with it, but remember—it is only a barrier. It is one of the protections of Magong. If the barrier must be destroyed in the line of duty, then do not attempt to save it at the cost of that which it was set up to protect. Do you understand?"

"Only father, I will be wary and circumspect, but I will not fail in the line of duty."

Once more we entered the compression tube and were shot back to the imperial palace. After bidding farewell to my mother, I said a last goodbye to my father, and went out to my flagship. There were tears in the eyes of my mother as she called her last farewell to me. My father was too much of a man of iron, however, to betray his emotion at such a time.

My fleet of ten thousand ether ships was ready for action, awaiting only my word of command. I had formed a daring plan which, if successful, might bring about the destruction of the fleet and my own death, but would make it possible for Magong to win the war.

Leaving half of my ships to guard the planet against enemy craft, I took the other half and made straight for Mars. Shortly after we started, the first huge missile of the Martians passed us, and a few minutes thereafter it struck Magong with a brilliant flare of light, leaving a great dark pit in the ground where it had fallen. Referring to my charts, I found that it had alighted on a small village of about two hundred souls. What a sudden and terrible end for them!

As we pressed onward, I saw another large nebula sprouting into shape, and knew that it would not be long until a second projectile was on the way to Magong.

Presently I saw a huge enemy fleet put out from Mars, evidently with the intention of meeting and giving battle to my fleet. This did not fit in with my plans at all, so I hurried at my general's secret orders to all of my commanders, then bade them disperse.

There were nearly a thousand magnetic wave stations on Mars, most of which were in continuous use because of the terrific efforts the Martians were putting forth to crash Magong. These stations were sending out powerful man-directed magnetic lines of force, which drew all relatively small portions of matter, with which they came in contact, toward the stations from which they were projected. This procedure would have been dangerous to the Martians themselves had they not been clever enough to cross the lines of force and form contracting vortices hundreds of thousands of miles from their planet. Under the direction of the central station, these vortices were continued and reformed at regular intervals, and visible nebulae resulted. The nebulae were condensed by extra and special lines of force from the central station, then projected at Magong, close knit, spherical clusters of stone and metal. When the central station was turned away from the target by the axial rotation of the planet, a duplicate control station on the other side carried on the work under the control of the same operators.

During the progress of my ship toward Mars, six of these huge clusters were projected at my world. Five of them struck the target and one missed, to shoot out into space and become an asteroid with an orbit of its own around the sun.

My plan was simple and direct. Each of my ships carried a chart, showing the location of the thousand enemy wave stations. Each station was numbered, and five ships were assigned to the attack of each.

My ship, together with four others of the most powerful of my navy, each carrying a battery of twenty huge ray projectors, was to attack the central magnetic station.

While we were en route toward Mars, I watched the movements of the enemy fleet, and saw that it was heading straight for Magong, evidently pleased at the fact that my first fleet had dispersed. This exactly suited my plans, as I knew that Hia Ku, my able lieutenant, would give them a warm reception with the five thousand ships I had left under his command, and I would be free to carry out my attack.



When I drew near the central wave station of the Martians I saw that my other four ships had arrived on schedule, and ordered the attack. We were discovered almost instantly, and a thousand red rays were flashed at us, but we were able to neutralize these by laying down a barrage of green rays. Then a number of Martian ether ships, reserved to guard the central station, arose and attacked us from above. One of their rays pierced our upper barrage and one of our ships, with her controls destroyed, plunged dizzy groundward, but was disintegrated by the red rays before she had fallen far way.

With this ship gone my barrage was weakened and I knew that it would only be a matter of minutes until we should all meet a like fate. As certain death faced us, I thought quickly, and as quickly gave orders, resolving that in our passing we should at least cripple the central wave station of the enemy. My ships instantly responded to my command and in a moment all were plunging directly downward, temporarily protected above and below by our green ray barrage—our objective the glass dome of the central wave station. It was my hope that when we crashed through this dome to our death we might destroy, or at least cripple this station, and thus hamper the Martians and give my father the time he needed to fit out other ships with atmosphere destroyers, thus assuring the victory of Magong.

But the Martians were too wise for me. They must have suddenly focused their lines of magnetic force on our ships, forming a contracting vortex a short distance above the dome, for we lost control of all of them simultaneously. They revolved about each other for a moment, and then crashed together. With that crash I lost consciousness. . . .

When I recovered my senses once more I was lying on a metal beach to which my hands and feet had been bound. Standing over me with a sneering smile on his pale face was Lido Kao, Supreme Ruler of Mars.

"What happened?" I asked, bewildered. "Where are my men?"

"All died but you," he replied, "when we brought your ships to the ground. I had thought to bring them down gently, but the rage of my operator got the better of him, and he wrecked all four. I cannot understand how it happened that you lived through that crash. It was a miraculous escape."

"Perhaps I have been saved for a purpose," I replied. "The Supreme Ruler of the Universe is all knowing."

"I, at least, have kept you for a purpose," replied Lido Kao, smugly. "Lying here on your back, you shall witness the destruction of your world." He pressed a lever and a curved metal plate slid back from the ceiling, disclosing a great dome like lens which looked out into space. "The empire of P'on ku is doomed," he continued. "While this side of our planet is turned toward Magong, you shall witness its destruction through this lens. As soon as we turn away the lens will become a mirror which will give you the battle scenes as witnessed from our station on the other side. I pride myself that this is a rather clever invention of mine."

I made no reply, but looked eagerly out toward Magong. Already the once

fair face of my planet was growing pock-marked and ugly from the cruel disease called war.

"You are a clever whelp," continued my captor, watching my features closely, "but not clever enough for Lido Kan. Your ships destroyed two hundred of my magnetic wave stations, but it will not take long to rebuild them, and in the meantime the others are functioning quite successfully, as you will observe. At least half of the population of Magong has already been destroyed by my projectiles."

"Don't be too sure of victory," I replied. "By the time you have destroyed Magong, you may find yourself without an atmosphere."

"Hardly. It will take many days for your father to destroy our atmosphere. One week is all I require to silence all of his ray projectors and exterminate his people. But enough of this idle talk. I must to the great work before me. I leave you to the pleasant contemplation of the dissolution of your heritage -- the empire of Magong."

Left quite alone in the small, bare observatory room, I lay on my back and watched the progress of the battle. High above me the Martians were forming an enormous cluster of meteoric material. Already it was at least ten times as large as any they had projected at Magong, and they continued to add to it. Presently I saw that it was ready to be projected. There was a terrific roar from the machinery in the building around me, and the huge globe shot outward, but not in the direction of Magong. It described a short curve and began to fall directly upon Mars. Once more there was a roar from the projector machinery, and once again the sphere shot outward, only to return, drawn by the terrific pull of Mars' gravity on its great mass.

A feeling of exultation came over me, as I saw that my enemies failed, again and again, in their efforts to project the sphere. It appeared to me that they had brought destruction on their own heads. But Lido Kan was not without resource. Suddenly I heard a more terrific roar from the machinery than had occurred before. A great section was split from the mighty sphere, and simultaneously, the larger and smaller pieces were projected obliquely out into space. This time they did not fall back, but continued to travel in curved paths. The smaller, moving much more swiftly than the larger, soon disappeared from view, but it reappeared again in a few hours. The larger, moving more majestically across the sky, appeared to travel in a direction opposite to that taken by the smaller, because of its slower motion and the axial rotation of the planet. I had witnessed the formation of the moons of Mars.

Foiled in his attempt to hurl so huge a projectile Lido Kan once more turned his attention to the firing of smaller ones. Hour after hour I watched, my lens presently turning to a mirror as Mars turned her face away from Magong, and each hour added to my sorrow as I saw the surface of my planet turning to enormous ringed pits. Presently an attendant brought me food and drink. Afterward, I slept at fitful intervals.



Days passed, and I detected new tactics on the part of my father. He evidently decided to risk all in an attempt to dodge the projectiles, for I saw that Magong was shifting out of her orbit—moving in closer to the sun in an eccentric fashion that would make it difficult for an operator to properly aim and time a projectile intended to strike her.

Soon I saw that he had moved into the orbit of Earth, then beyond it, between the orbits of Earth and Venus. At first I could notathom his plans, but gradually they dawned on me, as I saw Earth come along and Magong fall in behind her. It was his intention, I felt sure, to use the larger planet as a shield against the devastating Martian projectiles.

Something must have gone wrong with his control station, however, for Magong presently fell behind the Earth in her race around the sun. Then, rushing, crossing her orbit behind her, and hurried forward to catch her once more—this time outside Earth's orbit, between Earth and Mars. Something, also, had happened to Magong's rotation on her axis. Whereas she had previously revolved once in every twelve hours, she now turned with exceedingly slowness. Rushing on past Earth, she continued for some distance, then passed and fell back once more to wait for the larger planet. Magong, I could clearly see, was caught in the gravity net of Earth. Thus she had become a satellite of that planet, even as the huge broken projectile of Lido Kan had become two satellites of Mars.

Lido Kan kept up his pitiless bombardment of Magong, once he had grown accustomed to her new orbit, with deadly accuracy. Once, and once only, did I see him miss, the projectile, which was a relatively small one passing Magong and striking somewhere on the planet Earth. I could not tell just where, for most of the heavy cloud envelope that hid her soon hid it from view.

Although faint flashes of her position must have been wiped out by this time, I knew that Magong still kept up the fight, as the atmosphere in my room grew rarer each day and breathing was a continual effort.

One day Lido Kan entered my room. Strapped to his back was an apparatus containing concentrated air, from which he took about sips from time to time.

"I come to the leave of you, young whelp of Pan ku," he said. "My people are dying by the millions for want of air, thanks to the internal rays which your father has managed to keep trapped on us. Our dispirited troops, here can not be brought back, nor could we manufacture a new one, from the elements locked in the soil, in less than a thousand years. I am leaving, therefore, with the five hundred large ether ships I still possess, for the purpose of colonizing the desolate, uninhabited and savage planet Earth. My five projectile racons, I will leave manned, each being provided with a supply of concentrated air, and committed to the task of continuing the bombardment of Magong until death overtakes them.

"I will have one of your hands untied, and will leave you plenty of food and water so that when death finally overtakes you, you will be strong

my own father, as he continues to dissipate our atmosphere. And so, farewell."

He went out, and shortly thereafter, my attendant came in, placed a tank of water and a large basket of food within reach, and untethered one of my hands. Then he, too, went out, and I was left alone, gasping for breath, as the atmosphere continued to grow more rare.

Presently, I saw the fleet of Lido Kan set out. Instantly, with the tip of one of my eating sticks, I set about picking the locks of my father's. Within an hour I had freed myself. Flipping my door unlocked I rushed from the room. Presently I blundered into the great deserted room from which the official Martian ether visiphone messages had formerly been sent to Mingong. Opening a switch, I found that the power was still on, and signaled the station of my father. My heart gave a leap of joy when his face suddenly appeared in the disc before me.

"Have you any ether ships left?" I asked him, after we had exchanged greetings.

"Not quite a thousand."

"And does Hia Ku still live?"

"He lives, and commands the fleet during your absence."

"Then dispatch him at once to find and destroy the fleet of Lido Kan, who has just left here with five hundred ships, purposing to colonize Earth."

"Then the atmosphere is nearly dissipated?"

"It is."

"But what about you, my son? Are there any ships left in which you can return?"

"There are none near by, and I have not the strength left to go out and search for more. My death is only a matter of hours, and I am resigned to my fate."

"Do not despair, for I, your father, will save you. I will shut off the atmosphere-destroying rays at once, and will have a small, swift ship there to bring you back in less than four hours."

I returned to the room where I had been imprisoned, to watch for the ether ship, and true to the word of my father it appeared in less than four hours—a tiny, one-man craft. I hurried to the roof, reaching it just as the ship sighted. A man stepped out—an old and rich man, servant of my father.

"The ship from His Majesty, your father, Highness," he said.

"But why a one-man craft?" I asked.

"Hia Ku took all the others when he left to attack the fleet of Lido Kan, he replied. Then, before I could prevent him, he took a small, green ray projector from his belt and pressed the muzzle to his abdomen. With a gasping "Farewell, Highness," the brave and loyal fellow dropped dead at my feet.

Hours below once more, I entered the ether visiphone room and sig-



called my father. His face appeared in the disc. I told him what his messenger had done, and tears streamed from his eyes.

"Just another sacrifice to the rapacity of Lido Kan," he said. "Get into your craft now, and I'll turn on the rays once more."

I lost no time in getting back to the little craft and away from Mars. I was making swift progress toward Magong, when suddenly I happened on the remnants of the two battle fleets. There were only three of our ships left, and they were beleaguered by four enemy craft. Both flagships were still intact, and at the time, dueling with their enormous ray projectors—green against red. As I approached them, one of our ships was cut in two by a red ray, the halves hurtling out through space.

I had one small ray projector on my forward deck—a puny weapon indeed against those of the huge battleships, but I determined to enter the unequal contest. Selecting the helmsman's turret of the nearest enemy ship, I plunged toward it. My approach in the tiny craft was apparently unperceived, and I did not turn on my green ray until within less than a thousand feet of my target. When the ray struck it, the turret instantly collapsed, and the ship, out of control, swung broadside, scattering her ray barrage and leaving her hull unprotected. I instantly turned the nose of my craft upward and passed over her, noting as I did so that she had been broken up by the huge green rays from our two remaining battleships.

Without pausing to give the enemy a chance to understand just what had happened, I quickly plunged at the helmsman's turret of the next ship. Once again my tiny ray threw a mighty ship out of control, and it was destroyed by the green rays of Hia Ku. This time, however, I did not escape unscathed, for one of the red rays of the second ship, shooting wildly upward as she went out of control, had carried off part of my forward deck.

I tried to close the safety plate beneath my instrument board, to keep my air and warmth from escaping into outer space, but it stuck, and a cold that closely approached absolute zero swept over me. With numbed hands I pulled frantically at the recalcitrant plate, and in a moment more had it in place. In the meantime, however, my small, swift craft had hurtled away uncontrolled to a position nearly a thousand miles from the four remaining combatants.

I swung her to, and steered for the battle scene once more. Then I saw something which wrung a gasp of horror from my lips—a huge meteor cluster from Mars rushing straight at the four ships. I had no time to signal them—to do anything, in fact. A moment later it struck them, and all four combatants disappeared in a blinding flash of light without appearing to have had the slightest effect either on the path or the mass of the projectile.

With a heavy heart, I turned my ship toward Magong. A short time after, I saw the projectile strike. There was a small chart on board, and on referring to it, I found that it had destroyed one of our atmosphere disintegrating ray stations.

A two-hour run took me to Magong, during which time, four more

enormous projectiles hurtled past me on their death dealing errands. As I steered toward the palace of my father a fifth shot past me, hurling my tiny craft through the thin atmosphere like a leaf caught in a whirlwind. When I succeeded in righting it, and looking downward once more, a chill of horror crept over me, for this last messenger of death had dug a huge pit more than sixty miles in diameter, and the center of the pit marked the spot where my father's palace had stood. My beloved parents were no more. Pan ku, the mighty monarch, was dead. I was Pan ku, ruler of a desolate waste that had once been the mighty, flourishing empire of Magong.

I alighted near the rim of the enormous crater and stepped out of my craft. A moment later, gasping for breath, I hastily sprang back inside and closed the door. The atmosphere of Magong was nearly gone. With her huge ray projectors still going, she was committing suicide in order that her hated enemy might be destroyed.

Rising, I made for the nearest ray projector station. Circling close to it, I peered in the windows. Not a living soul greeted my gaze, but there were many dead bodies on the floors. The projectors, however, were still working—powered by machinery set to keep their rays on Mars until they should fail to function for lack of power.

An occasional meteor cluster struck Magong from time to time, but they grew smaller and fewer in number—a sure sign that their projectors were succumbing, one by one, to the death dealing rays our people had left trained on their planet. Rising, I made for the nearest world which would support human life—Earth. It was a good two hours' journey, and I noted with alarm that I had only a small supply of concentrated air in my tank—enough to last me about forty five minutes by using it judiciously.

Pressing my speed control lever to the highest notch, I rushed Earthward with super-meteoric swiftness. Forty five minutes passed, and still the Earth, although looming big ahead of me, was many thousands of miles away. Glancing at the indicator on my air tank, I saw that it registered zero. I closed my foul air escape valves, and breathed as lightly as possible. Presently I felt a deadly lethargy creeping over me. By exerting my will power to the utmost I managed to retain control of my senses for a few minutes longer.

Suddenly my waning consciousness registered the fact that my instruments showed I had nearly reached the outer limit of the Earth's atmosphere. To have entered it at the speed at which I was traveling would have meant a sudden, flaming death. Two things I managed to do before my senses fled—set my control lever at low speed, and unlatch the door beside me. Then came oblivion.

When I regained consciousness I was lying on the earthen floor of a large, mud-walled hut. Standing around me was an awe-stricken group of light-skinned, half-naked savages. I sat up, and as I did so, the earth shook beneath me and a portion of the mud wall collapsed, crushing



three men and a woman. The remainder of the savages prostrated themselves around me with every indication of supernatural fear.

I signed that I was hungry, and food and drink were instantly brought—~~a~~ a huge chunk of scotched meat and a white sour beverage which I afterward learned was the fermented milk of some animal. I ate and drank, and feeling stronger, arose and stepped out of the hut, walking as if my body had been weighted with lead because of the planet's tremendous gravitational pull. As I did so, the earth quivered once more, and the hut collapsed completely.

By signs I finally made the terror-stricken savages understand that I wished to know the whereabouts of my ether ship. One of them, who appeared bolder than the rest, led me to a place where an enormous fissure yawned in the hard ground. Far down in this fissure I saw the craft I sought. I was casting about for some means of rescuing it, when the earth trembled, and the crack closed over it.

Thus cut off from interplanetary travel—for I did not know how to construct another ether ship—I found myself earthbound. I immediately set about learning the simple language of the savages, living in a dwelling of skins tied to light poles, because of the frequent earthquake shocks. These, as well as the many volcanic eruptions, terrific electrical storms, meteor showers and electromagnetic displays from the polar regions, I knew were the results of the recent constant proximity of M going to Earth, and that things would, in time reach their proper balance once more. The savages, however, believed that the coming of "The great night light" and the subsequent terrifying phenomena, were due to some magic power which I possessed, and I was consequently worshiped as a god.

Propitiatory offerings of food, flocks, and animal skins poured in to me from neighboring tribes for hundreds of miles in all directions. Gradually the earthquake shocks subsided, the volcanic eruptions ceased to be continuous, the meteoric showers grew less frequent, and the elements became tractable. After a year had passed I married a daughter of the chief of the tribe among which I had taken. Other chieftains, learning that the god married women, quickly tendered the hands of their daughters.

One of these, I married from time to time, thus making alliances with tribe after tribe which none ought wish to break. I grew immensely wealthy, the wealth of these people was reckoned, and built me an immense palace. I have one, personally supervising the work of my horde of unskilled labor. I also built a temple for the worship of the great god, Tien, Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and taught my people to worship Him, and to regard me only as His earthly vicar.

Most of my numerous wives bore me children, and I was grateful for the fact that most of them, instead of resembling their mother's people, had the yellow skin, straight black hair, and slanting eyes of my race. My children grew up and married brave women and men, yet there was slight modification in the physiognomy of their offspring. As the years

passed, I learned that these people, my children and descendants included, rarely lived longer than a century, their average life span being about seventy years. When I passed the century mark without showing any signs of senility, it was noised about that I was an immortal. This belief increased my power, and consequently I neither denied nor affirmed its truth, although I knew I should be middle aged at two hundred and would probably be dead before I had traveled far in my third century of existence, as three centuries was the average life span for my race, and a total of four centuries rarely attained.

Having now reached my two hundred and ninety-eighth year, I am ready to return to my maker, leaving a hundred thousand descendants—a broad race who have long since ceased to intermarry with the white-skinned savages. They are known as the Celestial People, and I have made them lords over the lesser races of my mighty empire.

This record, which I have graven on age-defying stone with my own hands, will be sealed in the cave in which I am cutting it. I have calculated that, not less than five thousand years hence, the door of the cave will be revealed by erosion.

As the end approaches I feel the gift of prevision—the urge to prophecy. When my message is read, my descendants will be numbered by millions. They will not be scientists, but religionists. I see this tendency persisting in them, up to this day, and it will continue. Although I have taught them to read and write the language of my people and to worship T'ien, I have long since abandoned the attempt to teach them science. My every effort to get them to grasp even the rudiments of astronomy and physics was unavailing. My simplest statements along these lines were interpreted as symbolic religious utterances, and would arouse superstitious beliefs.

The pure language of my forefathers, together with the characters I have taught them, is undergoing a gradual change. It may be that, five thousand years hence, this writing will be unintelligible to my descendants. Time, however, should raise up a man among them, who will have the intelligence and the persistence necessary to decipher it. I picture him, however, as a studious man of religion, and therefore uninterested in its scientific aspects—and my scheme would reveal its purpose to communicate with others of its kind—minds that will understand.

To my descendant, I therefore give this charge:

Translate this writing into the languages of the leading nations of Earth. Then journey hence, to a place where you will find a pit three corners of a mile in width and more than five hundred and fifty feet deep. It will be ringed about by a wall a hundred and fifty feet in height. My figures are approximate because they are only calculations based on the size and speed of the meteoric mass which Mars projected to Earth.

Because it is unique on Earth, and exactly resembles the pits on my native planet, men of science who are interested in Mingong will eventually visit it. When you have found it, you will secrete yourself in the neighbor-



borhood and observe these men. Each time you see a true scientific visitor, watch the face of Magong for a sign. When a bright light appears, you will know that my soul has recognized the right person, and signaled you from its celestial abode.

Hand him a translation of this writing in his own language, and go about your own affairs with my blessing, for it is to him and to his kind that I, as a scientist, address this message.

And now, as I bring this, my life story, to a close, I look back over a long, and fairly happy existence spent on Earth, yet each time I view Magong, I cannot help thinking of what might have been, had it not been for that horrible, man-made plague called war. Nor can I repress a feeling of sadness at sight of my once proud world among worlds, now a lowly satellite, her war-scarred lifeless face forever turned sadly and submissively toward her new master, Earth.

# *The Unspeakable Betrothal*

by Robert Bloch

Robert Bloch, whose first serious novel *The Scarf* is now available in a popular thirty five cent Avon edition, has rung up a remarkable record for a young writer. It is with pleasure that we state that "*The Unspeakable Betrothal*" is a brand new story, here published for the first time. The tale of a beautiful girl marked by the stars for an outé destiny, it will be a find for the army of Bloch fans. It was written originally for an Avon pocket size anthology of new fantastic stories . . . from which space restrictions were to bar it. This new anthology, entitled *The Girl with the Hungry Eyes*, edited by the editor of the Avon Fantasy Reader, is now available on newsstands—or it may be purchased direct from us for a quarter, plus five cents handling charges. It features really excellent original fantasy stories by Fritz Leiber, Jr., Manly Wade Wellman, William Tenn, P. Schuyler Miller, Stephen Grendon, and Frank Belknap Long. Look for it.

"Not far thence is the secret garden in which grow like strange flowers the kinds of sleep, so different one from the other . . . the sleep induced by datura, by the multiple extracts of ether, the sleep of belladonna, of opium, of valerian; flowers whose petals remain shut until the day when the predestined visitor shall come and, touching them, bid them open, and for long hours inhale the aroma of their peculiar dreams into a marrelling and bewildered being."

Proust: *Remembrance of Things Past*

A

VIS knew she wasn't really as sick as Doctor Clegg had said. She was merely bored with living. The death-impulse, perhaps; then again, it might have been nothing more than her distaste for clever young men who persisted in addressing her as "*O rara Avis.*"

She felt better now, though. The fever had settled until it was no more than one of the white blankets which covered her—something she could



ress aside with a gesture, if it weren't so pleasant just to burrow into it, to snuggle deeply within its confining warmth.

Ava smiled as she realized the truth—monotony was the one thing that could bore her. The sterility of excitement was the really jading routine, after all. This quiet, uneventful feeling of restfulness seemed rich and fertile by comparison. Rich and fertile—creative—womb.

The words sunk. Back to the womb. Dark room, warm bed, lying down, the restful, nourishing lethargy of fever . . .

It wasn't the womb, exactly, she hadn't gone back that far, she knew. But it did remind her of the days when she was a little girl. Just a little girl with big round eyes, mirroring the earnesty that lay behind them. Just a little girl, living all alone in a huge old house, like a fairy princess in an enchanted castle.

Of course her aunt and uncle had lived here too, and it wasn't a really truly castle, and nobody else knew that she was a princess. Except Marvin Mason, that is.

Marvin had lived next door and sometimes he'd come over and play with her. They would come up to her room and look out of the high window—the little round window that bordered on the sky.

Marvin knew that she was a sure enough princess, and he knew that her room was an ivory tower. The window was an enchanted window, and when they stood on a chair and peered out they could see the world behind the sky.

Sometimes she wasn't quite sure if Marvin Mason honest and truly saw the world beyond the window; maybe he just said he did because he was stuck on her.

But he listened very quietly while she told him stories about that world. Sometimes she told him stories she had read in books, and other times she made them up out of her very own head. It was only later that the dreams came, and she told him *those* stories, too.

That is, she always started to, but somehow the words would go wrong. She didn't always know the words for what she saw in those dreams. They were very special dreams—they came only on those nights when Aunt Mary left the window open, and there was no moon. She would lie in the bed, all curled up in a little ball, and wait for the wind to come through the high, round window. It came quietly, and she would feel it on her forehead and neck, like fingers stroking. Cool, soft fingers, stroking her face, smoothing fingers that made her uncurl and stretch out so that the shadows could cover her body.

Even then she slept in the big bed and the shadows would pour down from the window in a pool. She wasn't asleep when the shadows came, so she knew they were real. They came on the breeze, from the window and covered her up. Maybe it was the shadows that were cool and not the wind, maybe the shadows stroked her hair until she fell asleep.

But she would sleep then, and the dreams always came. They allowed the same path as the wind and the shadows, they poured down from the

sky through the window. There were voices she heard but could not understand, colors she saw but could not name; shapes she glimpsed but which never seemed to resemble any figures she saw in picture books.

Sometimes the same voices and colors and shapes came again and again, until she learned to recognize them, in a way. There was the deep, buzzing voice that seemed to come from right inside her own head, although she knew it really issued from the black, shiny pyramid thing that had the arms with eyes on it. It didn't look so very or nasty, and there was nothing to be afraid of—Avis could never understand why Marvin Mason made her shut up when she started telling about those dreams.

But he was only a little boy, and he got scared and ran home to his Mommy. Avis didn't have any Mommy, only Aunt May; but she would never tell Aunt May such things. Besides, why should she? The dreams didn't frighten her, and they were so very real and interesting. Sometimes, on gray, rainy days when there was nothing to do but play with dolls or cut out pictures to paste in her album, she wished that night would hurry up and come. Then she could dream and make everything real again.

She got so she liked to stay in bed, and would pretend to have a cold so she didn't have to go to school. Avis would look up at the window and wait for the dreams to come—but they never came in the daytime, only at night.

Often she wondered what it was like *up there*.

The dreams must come from the sky, she knew that. The voices and shapes came way up, somewhere beyond the window. Aunt May said that rain came from tum-wackies, but she knew that wasn't so.

Aunt May was always worried about tummy aches, and she scolded Avis for not going outside to play; said she was getting pale and puffy.

But Avis felt fine, and she had her secret to think of. Now she scarcely ever saw Marvin Mason any more, and she didn't bother to read. It wasn't important to pretend she was a princess, either. Because the dreams were ever so much realer, and she could talk to the voices and ask them to take her with them when they went away.

She got so she could almost understand what they were saying. The sunny one that just hung through the window now—the one that looked like a bird—so much more to it she couldn't see—it made music inside her head that she recognized. Not a real tune, more like words in a rhyme. In her dreams she asked it to take her away. She would crawl up on its back and let it fly with her up over the stars. That was funny, asking it to fly, but she knew that the part beyond the window had wings. Wings as big as the world.

She begged and pleaded, but the voices made her understand that they couldn't take her far or back with them. That is, not entirely. Because it was too cold and too far, and something would change her.

She said she didn't care how she changed; she wanted to go. She would let them do anything they wanted if only they would take her. It would



place to be able to talk to them all the time and feel that cool softness; to dream forever.

One night they came to her and there were more things than she had ever seen before. They hung through the window and in the air all over the room they were so funny, some of them; you could see through them and sometimes one was partly inside another. She knew she giggled in her sleep, but she couldn't help it. Then she was quiet and listening to them.

They told her it was all right. They would carry her away. Only she mustn't tell anyone and she mustn't be frightened; they would come for her soon. They couldn't take her as she was, and she must be willing to change.

Avis said yes, and they all hummed a sort of music together, and went away.

The next morning Avis was really and truly sick and didn't want to get up. She could hardly breathe, she was so warm—and when Aunt May brought in a tray she wouldn't eat a bite.

That night she didn't dream. Her head ached, and she tossed all night long. But there was a moon out, so the dreams couldn't get through any way. She knew they would come back when the moon was gone again, so she waited. Besides, she hurt so that she didn't really care. She had to feel better before she was ready to go anywhere.

The next day Dr. Clegg came to see her. Dr. Clegg was a good friend of Aunt May's and he was always visiting her because he was her guardian.

Dr. Clegg held her hand and asked her what seemed to be the matter with his young lady today?

Avis was too smart to say anything, and besides there was a shiny thing in her mouth. Dr. Clegg took it out and looked at it and shook his head. After a while he went away and then Aunt May and Uncle Roscoe came in. They made her swallow some medicine that tasted just awful.

By this time it was getting dark and there was a storm coming outside. Avis wasn't able to talk much, and when they shut the round window she couldn't ask them to please leave it open tonight because there was no moon and they were coming for her.

But everything kept going round and round, and when Aunt May walked past the bed she seemed to flatten out like a shadow, or one of the things, only she made a loud noise which was really the thunder outside and now she was sleeping really and truly even though she heard the thunder but the thunder wasn't real nothing was real except the things that was it nothing was real any more but the things.

And they came through the window it wasn't closed after all because she opened it and she was crawling out high up there where she had never crawled before but it was easy without a body and soon she would have a new body they wanted the old one because they carried it but she didn't care because she didn't need it and now they would carry her *ulnagr Yuggoth farnomi ilyaa* . . . .

That was when Aunt Mary and Uncle Roscoe found her and pulled her

down from the window. They said later she had screamed at the top of her voice, or else she would have gone over without anyone noticing.

After that Dr. Clegg took her away to the hospital where there were no high windows and they came in to see her all night long. The dreams stopped.

When at last she was well enough to go back home, she found that the window was gone, too.

Aunt May and Uncle Roscoe had boarded it up, because she was a somnambulist. She didn't know what a somnambulist was, but guessed it had something to do with her being sick and the dreams not coming any more.

For the dreams stopped, then. There was no way of making them come back, and she really didn't want them any more. It was fun to play outside with Marvin Mason now, and she went back to school when the new semester began.

Now, without the window to look at, she just slept at night. Aunt May and Uncle Roscoe were glad, and Dr. Clegg said she was turning out to be a mighty fine little specimen.

Avis could remember it all now as though it were yesterday. Or today. Or tomorrow.

How she grew up. How Marvin Mason fell in love with her. How she went to college and they became engaged. How she felt the night Aunt May and Uncle Roscoe were killed in the crash at Leedsville. That was a bad time.

An even worse time was when Marvin Mason had gone away. He was in service now, overseas. She had stayed on all alone in the house, for it was her house now.

Reba came in days to do the housework, and Dr. Clegg dropped around, even after she turned 21 and officially inherited her estate.

He didn't seem to approve of her present mode of living. He asked her several times why she didn't shut up the house and move into a small apartment downtown. He was concerned because she showed no desire to keep up the friendships she had made in college. Avis was curiously reminded of the solitude he had exhibited during her childhood.

But Avis was no longer a child. She proved that by removing what had always seemed to her a symbol of adult domination; she had the high round window in her room unboarded once more.

It was a silly gesture. She knew it at the time, but somehow it held a curious significance for her. For one thing it re-established a linkage with her childhood, and more and more childhood came to epitomize happiness for her.

With Marvin Mason gone, and Aunt May and Uncle Roscoe dead, there was little enough to fill the present. Avis would sit up in her bedroom and pore over the scrapbooks she had so assiduously pasted up as a girl. She had kept her dolls and the old fairy tale books; she spent drowsy afternoons examining them.

It was almost possible to lose one's time-sense in such pastimes. Her sur



room's ings were unchanged. Of course, Avis was larger now and the bed wasn't quite as massive nor the window as high.

But both were there, waiting for the little girl that she became when, at night, she curled up into a ball and snuggled under the sheets—snuggled and stared up at the high, round window that bordered the sky.

Avis wanted to dream again.

At first, she *couldn't*.

After all, she was a grown woman, engaged to be married; she wasn't a character out of *Peter Ibbetson*. And those dreams of her childhood had been silly.

But they were *nice*. Yes, even when she had been old and nearly fallen out of the window that time, it had been pleasant to dream. Of course those voices and shapes were nothing but Freudian fantasies; every one knew that.

Or did they?

Suppose it was all real? Suppose dreams are not just subconscious manifestations caused by indigestion and gas pressure.

What if dreams are really a product of electronic impulse—or planetary radiations—attuned to the wavelength of the sleeping mind? Thought is an electrical impulse. Life itself is an electrical impulse. Perhaps a creature like a spiritualist medium; placed in a receptive state during sleep, in contact with ghosts, the creatures of another world or another dimension can come through, if the sleeper is granted the rare gift of acting as a *filter*. What if the dreams feed on the dreamer for substance, just as spirits attain ectoplasmic being by draining the medium of energy?

Avis thought and thought about it, and when she had evolved to a theory, everything seemed to fit. Not that she would ever tell anyone about her attitude. Dr. Clegg would only laugh at her, or still worse, shake his head. Marvin Mason didn't approve either. Nobody wanted her to dream. They still treated her like a little girl.

Very well, she would be a little girl, a little girl who could do as she pleased, now. She would dream.

It was shortly after reaching this decision that the dreams began again, almost as though they had been waiting until she would fully accept them in terms of their own reality.

Yes, they came back, slowly at first at a time. Avis found that it helped to concentrate on the past during the day, to strive to remember her childhood. To this end she spent more and more time in her room, leaving Peter to tend to housework downstairs. As for fresh air, she always could look out of her window. It was high and small, but she would climb on a stool and gaze up at the sky through the round aperture; watching the clouds that veiled the blue heaven and waiting for night to come.

Then she would lie in the big bed and wait for the wind. The wind would come and the darkness would come, and soon she could hear the luzzing, carrying voices. At last they would come back, and they were faint

and far away. Gradually they increased in intensity and once more she was able to discriminate, to recognize individual intonations.

Timidly, hesitantly, the figures re-emerged. Each night they grew stronger. Avis Long (the girl with big round eyes in big bed below round window) welcomed their presence.

She wasn't alone any more. No need to see her friends, or talk to that silly old Dr. Clegg. No need to waste much time gossiping with Reba or fussing over meals. No need to dress or venture out. There was the window by day and the dreams by night.

Then all at once she was curiously weak, and this illness came. But it was all false, somehow; this physical change.

Her mind was untouched. She knew that. No matter how often Dr. Clegg pursed his lips and hinted about calling in a "specialist", she wasn't afraid. Of course Avis knew he really wanted her to see a psychiatrist. The chattering tool was filled with gab patter about "retreat from reality" and "escape mechanisms".

But he didn't understand about the dreams. She wouldn't tell him, either. He'd never know the richness, the fulness, the sense of completion that came from experiencing contact with other worlds.

Avis knew *that* now. The voices and shapes that came in the window were from other worlds. As a naive child she had invited them by her very unsophistication. Now, striving consciously to return to the childlike attitude, she again admitted them.

They were from other worlds, words of wonder and splendor. Now they could meet only on the plane of dreams, but someday; someday soon, she would bridge the gap.

They whispered about her body. Something about the trip, making the "change". It couldn't be explained in *their* words. But she trusted them, and after all, a physical change was of slight importance contrasted with the opportunity.

Soon she would be well again, strong again. Strong enough to say "yes." And then they would come for her when the moon was right. Until then, she could strengthen the determination, and the dream.

Avis Long lay in the great bed and basked in the blackness, the blackness that poured palpably through the open window. The shapes filtered down, wriggling through the warps, feeding upon the night, growing, pulsing, encompassing all.

They reassured her about the body but she didn't care and she told them she didn't care because the body was unimportant and yes she would gladly consider it an exchange if only she could go and she knew she belonged.

Not beyond the rim of the stars but between it and amongst substance dwells that which is blackness in blackness for Yaggoth is only a symbol no matter how wrong there are no symbols for all is reality and only perception is limited ch'yar ul'nyar shaggornyth. . .



*It is hard for us to make you understand but I do understand you can not fight it I will not fight it they will try to stop you nothing shall stop me for I belong yes you belong will it be soon yes it will be soon very soon yes very soon . . .*

Marvin Mason was unprepared for this sort of reception. Of course, Avis hadn't written, and she wasn't at the station to meet him—but the possibility of her being seriously ill had never occurred to him.

He had come out to the house at once, and it was a shock when Dr. Clegg met him at the door.

The old man's face was grim, and the tenor of his opening remarks still grimmer.

They faced each other in the library downstairs; Mason self-consciously diffident in khaki, the older man a bit too professionally brusque.

"Just what is it, Doctor?" Mason asked.

"I don't know. Slight, recurrent fever. Listlessness. I've checked everything. No TB, no trace of low-grade infection. Her trouble isn't organic."

"You mean something's wrong with her mind?"

Dr. Clegg slumped into an armchair and lowered his head.

"Mason, I could say many things to you; about the psychosomatic theory of medicine, about the benefits of psychiatry, about—but never mind. It would be sheer hypocrisy."

"I've talked to Avis; rather, I've tried to talk to her. She won't say much, but what she does say disturbs me. Her actions disturb me even more."

"You can guess what I'm driving at, I think, when I tell you that she is leading the life of an eight-year-old girl. The life she *did* lead at that age."

Mason scowled. "Don't tell me she sits in her room again and looks out of that window?"

Dr. Clegg nodded.

"But I thought it was boarded up long ago, because she's a somnambulist and—"

"She had it unboarded, several months ago. And she is not, never was, a somnambulist."

"What do you mean?"

"Avis Long never walked in her sleep. I remember the night she was found on that window's edge; not ledge, for there is no ledge. She was perched on the edge of the open window, already halfway out, a little tyke hanging through a high window."

"But there was no chair beneath her, no ladder. No way for her to climb up. She was simply *there*."

Dr. Clegg looked away before continuing.

"Don't ask me what it means. I can't explain, and I wouldn't want to. I'd have to talk about the things she talks about—the dreams, and the presences that come to her, the presences that want her to go away."

"Mason, it's up to you. I can't honestly move to have her committed on the basis of material evidence. Confinement means nothing to *them*, you can't build a wall to keep out dreams.

"But you love her. You can save her. You can make her well, make her take an interest in reality. Oh, I know it sounds mawkish and stupid, just as the other sounds wild and fantastic.

"Yet it's true. It's happening right now, to her. She's asleep up in her room at this very moment. She's hearing the voices. I know that much. Let her hear your voice."

Mason walked out of the room and started up the stairs.

"But what do you mean, you can't marry me?"

Mason stared at the nudged figure in the swirl of bedclothes. He tried to avoid the direct stare of Avis Long's curiously childlike eyes; just as he avoided gazing up at the black, ominous aperture of the round window.

"I can't, that's all," Avis answered. Even her voice seemed to hold a childlike quality. The high, piercing tones might well have emanated from the throat of a little girl; a tired little girl, half-asleep and a bit petulant about being abruptly awakened.

"But our plans—your letters—"

"I'm sorry, dear. I can't talk about it. You know I haven't been well. Dr. Clegg is downstairs, he must have told you."

"But you're getting better," Mason pleaded. "You'll be up and around again in a few days."

Avis shook her head. A smile—the secret smile of a naughty child—clung to the corners of her mouth.

"You can't understand, Marvin. You never *could* understand. That's because you belong here." A gesture indicated the room. "I belong somewhere else." Her finger stabbed, unconsciously, towards the window.

Marvin looked at the window now. He couldn't help it. The round black hole that led to nothingness. Or—something. The sky outside was dark, moonless. A cold wind curled about the bed.

"Let me close the window for you, dear," he said, striving to keep his voice even and gentle.

"No."

"But you're ill—you'll catch cold."

"That isn't why you want to close it." Even in accusation, the voice was curiously piping. Avis sat bolt upright and confronted him.

"You're jealous, Marvin. Jealous of me. Jealous of *them*. You would never let me dream. You would never let me go. And I want to go. They're coming for me.

"I know why Dr. Clegg sent you up here. He wants you to persuade me to go away. He'd like to shut me up, just as he wants to shut the window. He wants to keep me here because he's afraid. You're all afraid of what lies—out there.



"Well, it's no use. You can't stop me. You can't stop *them*!"

"Take it easy, darling—"

"Never mind. Do you think I care what they do to me, if only I can go? I'm not afraid. I know I can't go as I am now. I know they must alter me."

"There are certain parts they want for reasons of their own. You'd be frightened as I told you. But I'm not afraid. You say I'm sick and insane; don't deny it. Yet I'm healthy enough, sane enough to face them and the world. It's you who are too morbid to endure it all."

Avis Long was wailing now; a thin, high-pitched wail of a little girl in a tantrum.

"You and I are leaving this house tomorrow," Mason said. "We're going away. We'll be married and live happily ever after—in good old storybook style. The trouble with you, young lady, is that you've never had to grow up. All this nonsense about goblins and other worlds—"

Avis screamed.

Mason ignored her.

"Right now I'm going to shut that window," he declared.

Avis continued to scream. The shrill vibration echoed on a sustained note as Mason reached up and closed the round pane of glass over the black aperture. The wind resisted his efforts, but he shut the window and secured the latch.

Then her fingers were digging into his throat from the rear, and her scream was pouring down his ear.

"I'll kill you!" he wailed. It was the wail of an enraged child.

But there was nothing of the child, or the invalid, in the strength behind her clawing fingers. He fought her off, pinning.

Then, suddenly, Dr. Clegg was in the room. A hypodermic needle flashed and gleamed in an arc of plunging silver.

They carried her back to the bed, tucked her in. The blankets nestled about the weary face of a child in sleep.

The window was closed tightly now.

Everything was in order as the two men turned out the light and retreated from the room.

Neither of them said a word until they stood downstairs once again.

Facing the fireplace, Mason sighed.

"Somehow I'll get her out of here tomorrow," he promised. "Perhaps it was too abrupt—my coming back tonight and waking her. I wasn't very tactful."

"But something about her; something about that room, frightened me."

Dr. Clegg lit his pipe. "I know," he said. "That's why I couldn't pretend to you that I completely understand. There's more to it than mere hallucination."

"I'm going to sit up here tonight," Mason continued. "Just in case something might happen."

"She'd sleep," Dr. Clegg assured him. "No need to worry."

"I'd feel better if I stay. I'm beginning to get a theory about all this talk—other words, and changes in her body before a trip. It ties in with the window, somehow. And it sounds like a fantasy or a sequel."

"The death impulse? Perhaps. I should have thought of that possibility. Dreams foreshadowing death—on second thought, Mason, I may stay with you. We can make ourselves comfortable here before the morn', I suppose."

Silence settled.

It must have been well after midnight before either of them moved from their place before the fire.

Then a sharp splinter of sound crashed from above. Before the tinkling echo died away, both men were on their feet and moving towards the stairway.

There was no further noise from above, and neither of them exchanged a single word. Only the thud of their running footsteps on the stairs broke the silence. And as they paused outside Avis Long's room, the silence seemed to deepen in intensity. It was a silence palpable, complete, accomplished.

Dr. Clegg's hand darted to the doorknob, wrenched it ineffectually.

"Locked," he muttered. "She must have gotten up and locked it."

Mason scowled.

"The window—do you think she could have—?"

Dr. Clegg refused to meet his glance. Instead he turned and put his massive shoulder to the door panel. A bulge of muscle ridged his neck.

Then the pane splintered and gave way. Mason reached around and opened the door from inside.

They entered the darkened room, Dr. Clegg, in the lead, fumbling for the light switch. The harsh, electric glare flooded the scene.

It was a tribute to the power of suggestion that both men glanced, not at the patient in the bed, but at the round window high up on the wall.

Cold night air streamed through a jagged aperture, where the glass had been shattered, as though by the blow of a gigantic fist.

Fragments of glass littered the floor beneath, but there was no trace of any missile. And obviously, the glass had been broken from the outer side of the pane.

"The wind," Mason murmured, weakly, but he could not look at Dr. Clegg as he spoke. For there was no wind, only the cold, soft breeze that flowed ever so gently from the nighted sky above. Only the cold, soft breeze, rustling the curtains and prompting a sarabande of shadows on the wall, shadows that danced in silence over the great bed in the corner.

The breeze and the silence and the shadows enveloped them as they stared now at the bed.

Avis Long's head was turned towards them on the pillow. They could see her face quite plainly, and Dr. Clegg realized on the basis of experience what Mason knew instinctively—Avis Long's eyes were closed in death.



But that is not what made Mason gasp and shudder nor did the sight of death alone cause Dr. Clegg to scream aloud.

There was nothing whatsoever to frighten the beholder of the placid countenance turned towards them in death. They did not scream at the sight of Avis Long's face.

Lying on the pillow of the huge bed, Avis Long's face bore a look of perfect peace.

But Avis Long's body was . . . gone.

# *The Stone Ship*

by *William Hope Hodgson*

What real need have the imaginative for other worlds or distant epochs when we possess on our own Earth a vast area of unexplored and, despite our boasted discoveries, still pretty much unexplorable territory. In this realm, which exceeds in mileage all the lands mapped by men, there exists heaven alone knows what beings, what natural powers and unsuspected possibilities. We refer, if you're still puzzled, to the world of the oceans, about whose bottoms we know scarcely more than we do of the craters of the moon—and which hold for us a far greater influence. William Hope Hodgson gives us in the strange account of "The Stone Ship" just a glimpse of the unplumbed world that girdles the lands we know.



RUM things!—Of course there are rum things happen at sea—As rum as ever there were I remember when I was in the *Alfred Jessop*, a small barque, whose owner was her skipper, we came across a most extraordinary thing.

We were twenty days out from London, and well down into the tropics. It was before I took my ticket, and I was in the fo'castle. The day had passed without a breath of wind, and the night found us with all the lower sails up in the buntlines.

Now, I want you to take good note of what I am going to say:—

When it was dark in the second dog watch, there was not a sail in sight; not even the far off smoke of a steamer, and no land nearer than Africa, about a thousand miles to the eastward of us.

It was our watch on deck from eight to twelve, midnight, and my lookout from eight to ten. For the first hour, I walked to and fro across the break of the fo'castle head, smoking my pipe and just listening to the quiet. . . . Ever heard the kind of silence you can get away out at sea? You need to be in one of the old time windjammers, with all the lights dowsed, and the sea as calm and quiet as some queer plain of death. And then you want a pipe and the lonesomeness of the fo'castle head, with the caps'n to



lean against while you listen and think. And all about you, stretching out into the miles only and always the enormous silence of the sea, spreading out a thousand miles every way into the everlasting, brooding night. And not a light anywhere, not on all the waste of waters nor ever a sound as I have told, except the faint moaning of the masts and gear, as they creak and whine a little to the occasional invisible roll of the ship.

And suddenly, across all this silence, I heard Jensen's voice from the head of the starboard steps, say:—

"Did you hear *that*, Duprey?"

"What?" I asked, cocking my head up. But as I questioned I heard what he heard—the constant sound of running water, for all the world like the noise of a brook running down a hillside. And the queer sound was surely not a hundred fathoms off our port bow!

"By gum!" said Jensen's voice, out of the darkness. "That's damn a sort of funny!"

"Shut up!" I whispered, and went across, in my bare feet, to the port rail, where I leaned out into the darkness, and stared towards the curious sound.

The noise of a brook running down a hillside continued where there was no brook for a thousand sea miles in any direction.

"What is it?" said Jensen's voice again, scarcely above a whisper now. From below him on the main deck, there came several voices questioning—*"Hark!" "Stow the talk!" "... there!" "Listen!" "Lord love us, what is it?"* And then Jensen muttering to them to be quiet.

There followed a full minute, during which we all heard the brook, where no brook could ever run, and then, out of the night there came a sudden hoarse incredible sound—ooaze, ooaze, arrrr, arrrr, ooaze—a stupendous sort of croak, deep and somehow monstrous, out of the darkness. In the same instant, I found myself shivering all over. There was a queer rank smell, stealing through the night.

"Forward there on the look-out!" I heard the mate staging out away aft. "Forward there! What the blazes are you doing!"

I heard him come clattering down the port ladder from the poop, and then the sound of his feet at a run along the main deck. Simultaneously, there was a thudding of bare feet, as the watch below came racing out of the fo'cas'le beneath me.

"Now then! Now then! Now then!" shouted the Mate, as he charged up on to the fo'cas'le head.

"What's up?"

"It's something off the port bow, Sir," I said. "Running water! And then that sort of howl. . . . Your night glasses," I suggested.

"Can't see a thing," he growled, as he stared away through the dark. "There's a sort of mist. Phoo! what a devil of a stink!"

"Look!" said someone down on the main deck. "What's that?"

I saw it in the same instant, and caught the Mate's elbow.

"Look, Sir," I said, "There's a light there, about three points off the bow. It's moving."

The Mate was staring through his night glasses, and suddenly he thrust them into my hands:—

"See if you can make it out," he said, and forthwith put his hands round his mouth, and belowed into the night: "Ahoy there! Ahoy there! Ahoy there!" his voice going out lost into the silence and darkness all around. But there came never a comprehensible answer, only all the time the eternal noise of a brook running out there on the sea, a thousand miles from any brook of earth; and away on the port bow, a vague shapeless shining.

I put the glasses to my eyes, and stared. The light was bigger and brighter, seen through the binoculars; but I could make nothing of it, only a dim, elongated shining, that moved vaguely in the darkness, apparently a hundred fathoms or so, away on the sea.

"Ahoy there! Ahoy there!" sang out the Mate again. Then, to the men below:—"Quiet there on the main-deck!"

There followed about a minute of intense stillness, during which we all listened; but there was no sound, except the constant noise of water running steadily.

I was watching the curious shining, and I saw it flick out suddenly at the Mate's shout. Then in a moment I saw three dull lights, one under the other, that flicked in and out intermittently.

"Here give me the glasses!" said the Mate, and grabbed them from me.

He stared intensely for a moment, then swore, and turned to me:—

"What do you make of them?" he asked, abruptly.

"I don't know, Sir," I said. "I'm just puzzled. Perhaps it's electricity, or something of that sort."

"Oh hell!" he replied, and leant far out over the rail, staring. "Lord!" he said, for the second time, "what a stink!"

As he spoke, there came a most extraordinary thing; for there sounded a series of heavy reports out of the darkness, seeming in the silence, almost as loud as the sound of small cannon.

"They're shooting!" shouted a man on the main-deck, suddenly.

The Mate said nothing; only he snuffed violently at the night air. "By Gum!" he muttered, "what is it?"

I put my hand over my nose, for there was a terrible, chimney-like stench filling all the night about us.

"Take my glasses, Duprey," said the Mate after a few minutes further waiting. "Keep an eye over yonder. I'm going to call the Captain."

He pushed his way down the ladder, and hurried aft. About five minutes later, he returned forward with the Captain and the Second and Third Mates, all in their shirts and trousers.

"Anything fresh, Duprey?" asked the Mate.

"No, Sir," I said, and handed him back his glasses. "The lights have



gone again, and I think the mist is thicker. There's still the sound of running water out there."

The Captain and the three Mates stood some time along the port rail of the castle head, watching through their night glasses, and listening. Twice the Mate hailed; but there came no reply.

There was some talk, among the officers, and I gathered that the Captain was thinking of investigating.

"Clear one of the life boats Mr. Gelt," he said, at last. "The glass is steady; there'll be no wind for hours yet. Pick out half a dozen men. Take 'em out of either watch, if they want to come. I'll be back when I've got my coat."

"Away aft with you, Duprey, and some of you others," said the Mate. "Get the cover off the port life-boat, and bail her out."

"'I, 'I, Sir," I answered, and went away aft with the others.

We had the boat into the water within twenty minutes, which is good time for a wind jammer, where boats are generally used as storage receptacles for odd gear.

I was one of the men told off to the boat, with two others from our watch, and one from the starboard.

The Captain came down the end of the main tops'l halyards into the boat, and the Third after him. The Third took the tuler, and gave orders to cast off.

We pulled out clear of our vessel, and the Skipper told us to lie on our oars for a moment while he took his bearings. He leant forward to listen, and we all did the same. The sound of the running water was quite distinct across the quietness, but it struck me as seeming not so loud as earlier.

I remember now, that I noticed how plain the mist had become—a sort of warm, wet mist, not a bit thick; but just enough to make the night very dark, and to be visible, eddying slowly in a thin vapour round the port side light, looking like a red cloudiness swirling lazily through the red glow of the big lamp.

There was no other sound at this time, beyond the sound of the running water, and the Captain, after handing something to the Third Mate, gave the order to give-way.

I was rowing stroke, and close to the officers, and so was able to see dimly that the Captain had passed a heavy revolver over to the Third Mate.

"Ho!" I thought to myself, "so the Old Man's a notion there's really something dangerous over there."

I slipped a hand quickly behind me, and felt that my sheath knife was clear.

We pulled easily for about three or four minutes, with the sound of the water growing plainer somewhere ahead in the darkness, and astern of us, a vague red glowing through the night and vapour, showed where our vessel was lying.

We were rowing easily, when suddenly the bow oar muttered "G lord "

Immediately afterwards, there was a loud splashing in the water on his side of the boat.

"What's wrong in the bows, there?" asked the Skipper, sharply.

"There's somethin' in the water, Sir, messing round my oar," said the man.

I stopped rowing, and looked round. All the men did the same. There was a farther sound of splashing, and the water was driven right over the boat in showers. Then the bow-oar called out: "There's somethin' got a holt of my oar, Sir!"

I could tell the man was frightened, and I knew suddenly that a curious nervousness had come to me—a vague, uncomfortable dread, such as the memory of an ugly tale will bring, in a lonesome place. I believe every man in the boat had a similar feeling. It seemed to me in that moment, that a definite, muggy sort of silence was all round us, and this in spite of the sound of the splashing, and the strange noise of the running water somewhere ahead of us on the dark sea.

"It's let go the oar, Sir!" said the man.

Abruptly, as he spoke, there came the Captain's voice in a roar—"Back water all!" he shouted. "Put some beef into it now! Back all! Back all! . . . Why the devil was no lantern put in the boat! Back now! Back! Back!"

We backed fiercely, with a will, for it was plain that the Old Man had some good reason to get the boat away pretty quickly. He was right, too; though, whether it was guess-work, or some kind of instinct that made him shout out at that moment, I don't know; only I am sure he could not have seen anything in that absolute darkness.

As I was saying, he was right in shouting to us to back, for we had not backed more than half a dozen fathoms, when there was a tremendous splash right ahead of us, as if a house had fallen into the sea; and a regular wave of sea-water came at us out of the darkness, throwing our bows up, and soaking us fore and aft.

"Good Lord!" I heard the Third Mate gasp out. "What the devil's that?"

"Back all! Back! Back!" the Captain sung out again.

After some moments, he had the tiller put over, and told us to pull. We gave way with a will, as you may think, and in a few minutes were alongside our own ship again.

"Now then, men," the Captain said, when we were safe aboard, "I'll not order any of you to come; but after the steward's served out a tot of grog each, those who are willing, can come with me, and we'll have another go at finding out what devil's work is going on over yonder."

He turned to the Mate, who had been asking questions:—

"Say, Mister," he said, "it's no sort of thing to let the boat go without a lamp aboard. Send a couple of the lads into the lamp locker, and pass out a couple of the anchor-lights, and that deck bull's-eye, you use at nights for clearing up the ropes."

He whipped round on the Third. "Tell the steward to buck up with



hat grog, Mr. Andrews," he said, "and while you're there, pass out the axes from the rack in my cabin."

I went along a minute later; and then the Third Mate with three big axes from out the cabin rack.

"Now then, men," said the Skipper, as we took our tots off, "those who are coming with me, had better take an axe each from the Third Mate. They're mighty good weapons in any sort of trouble."

We all stepped forward, and he burst out laughing, slapping his thigh. "That's the kind of thing I like!" he said. "Mr. Andrews, the axes won't go round. Pass out that old cutlass from the steward's pantry. It's a pretty hefty piece of iron!"

The old cutlass was brought, and the man who was short of an axe, collared it. By this time, two of the 'prentices had filled (at least we supposed they had filled them) two of the ship's anchor lights, also they had brought out the bull's-eye lamp we used when clearing up the ropes on a dark night. With the lights and the axes and the cutlass, we felt ready to face anything, and down we went again into the boat, with the Captain and the Third Mate after us.

"Lash one of the lamps to one of the boat hooks, and rig it out over the bows," ordered the Captain.

This was done, and in this way the light lit up the water for a couple of fathoms ahead of the boat; and made us feel less that something could come at us without our knowing. Then the painter was cast off, and we gave way again toward the sound of the running water, out there in the darkness.

I remember now that it struck me that our vessel had drifted a bit, for the sound seemed farther away. The second anchor light had been put in the stern of the boat, and the Third Mate kept it between his feet, while he steered. The Captain had the bull's-eye in his hand, and was pricking up the wick with his pocket-knife.

As we pulled, I took a glance or two over my shoulder; but could see nothing, except the lamp making a yellow halo in the mist round the boat's bows, as we forged ahead. Astern of us, on our quarter, I could see the dull red glow of our vessel's port light. That was all, and not a sound in all the sea, as you might say, except the roll of our oars in the rowlocks, and somewhere in the darkness ahead, that curious noise of water running steadily; now sounding, as I have said, fainter and seeming farther away.

"It's got my oar again, Sir!" exclaimed the man at the bow oar, suddenly, and jammed to his feet. He loosed his oar up with a great splashing of water into the air, and immediately something whirled and beat about in the yellow halo of light over the bows of the boat. There was a crash of breaking wood, and the boat-hook was broken. The lamp scudded down into the sea, and was lost. Then in the darkness, there was a heavy splash, and a shout from the bow oar:—"It's gone, Sir. It's loosed off the oar!"

"Vast paining, all!" sung out the Skipper. Not that the order was neces-

sary for not a man was pulling. He had jumped up, and whipped a big revolver out of his coat pocket.

He had this in his right hand, and the bull's-eye in his left. He stopped around smartly over the oars from thwart to thwart, till he reached the bows, where he shone his light down into the water.

"My word!" he said. "Lord in Heaven! Saw anyone ever the like!"

And I doubt whether any man ever did see what we saw then; for the water was thick and lying for yards round the boat with the biggest eels I ever saw before or after.

"Give way, men," said the Skipper, after a minute. "Yon's no explanation of the almighty queer sounds out yonder were hearing this night. Give way, lads!"

He stood right up in the bows of the boat, shining his bull's-eye from side to side, and flashing it down on the water.

"Give way, lads!" he said again. "They don't like the light, that I keep them from the oars. Give way steady now. Mr. Andrews, keep her dead on for the noise out yonder."

We pulled for some minutes, during which I felt my oar plucked at twice: but a flash of the Captain's lamp seemed sufficient to make the brutes loose hold.

The noise of the water running, appeared now quite near sounding. About this time, I had a sense again of an added sort of silence to all the natural quietness of the sea. And I had a return of the curious nervousness that had touched me before. I kept listening intensely, as if I expected to hear some other sound than the noise of the water. It came to me suddenly that I had the kind of feeling one has in the aisle of a large cathedral. There was a sort of echo in the night—an incredibly faint reduplication of the noise of our oars.

"Hark!" I said, awfully not realizing at first that I was speaking aloud. "There's an echo—"

"That's it!" the Captain cut in, sharply. "I thought I heard something rummy!"

... "I thought I heard something rummy," said a thin ghostly echo, out of the night. ... "thought I heard something rummy" ... "heard something rummy." The words went muttering and whispering to and fro in the night about us, in rather a horrible fashion.

"Good Lord!" said the Old Man, in a whisper.

We had all stopped rowing, and were staring about us into the thin mist that filled the night. The Skipper was standing with the bull's-eye lamp above his head, circling the beam of light round from port to starboard, and back again.

Abruptly, as he did so, it came to me that the mist was thinner. The sound of the running water was very near, but it gave back no echo.

"The water doesn't echo, Sir," I said. "That's damn funny!"

"That's damn funny," came back at me from the darkness to port and



starboard, in a multitudinous muttering. . . "Damn funny! . . . funny . . . eeey!"

"Give way!" said the Old Man, loudly "I'll bottom this!"

"I'll bottom this . . . Bottom this . . . this!" The echo came back in a sensible rolling of unexpected sound. And then we had dipped our oars again, and the night was full of the reiterated rolling echoes of our rowlocks.

Suddenly the echoes ceased and there was, strangely, the sense of a great space about us, and in the same moment the sound of the water running appeared to be directly before us but somehow up in the air.

"Vast rowing!" said the Captain, and we lay on our oars staring round into the darkness ahead. The Old Man swang the beam of his lamp upwards, making circles with it in the night, and abruptly I saw something looming vaguely through the thinner seeming mist.

"Look, Sir," I called to the Captain "Quick, Sir, your light right above you! There's something up there!"

The Old Man flashed his lamp upwards and found the thing I had seen. But it was too indistinct to make anything of, and even as he saw it, the darkness and mist seemed to wrap it about.

"Pull a couple of strokes, all!" said the Captain "Stow your talk, there in the boat! . . . Again! . . . That'll do! Vast pulling!"

He was sending the beam of his lamp constantly across that part of the night where we had seen the thing, and suddenly I saw it again.

"There, Sir!" I said, "A little to starboard with the light."

He flicked the light swiftly to the right, and immediately we all saw the thing plainly—a strangely made mast, standing up there out of the mist, and looking like no spar I had ever seen.

It seemed now that the mist must lie pretty low on the sea in places, for the mast stood up out of it fairly for several fathoms; but lower, it was hidden in the mist, which I thought, seemed heavier now all round us but thinner, as I have said, above.

"Ship ahoy!" sung out the Skipper, suddenly, "Ship ahoy, there!" For some moments there came never a sound back to us except the constant noise of the water running, not a score yards away, and then, it seemed to me that a vague echo beat back at us out of the mist, oddly—"Ahoy! Ahoy! Ahoy!"

"There's something hauling us, Sir," said the Third Mate.

Now, that "something" was significant. It showed the sort of feeling that was on us all.

"That's na ship's mast as ever I've seen!" I heard the man next to me mutter. "It's got a unnatcheral look."

"Ahoy there!" shouted the Skipper again, at the top of his voice, "Ahoy there!"

With the suddenness of a clap of thunder there burst out at us a vast,

granting oooaze arrrr, arrrr; oooaze—a volume of sound so great that it seemed to make the loom of the oar in my hand vibrate.

‘Good Lord!’ said the Captain, and levelled his revolver into the mist; but he did not fire.

I had loosed one hand from my oar, and gripped my axe. I remember thinking that the Skipper’s pistol wouldn’t be much use against whatever thing made a noise like that.

‘It wasn’t ahead, Sir,’ said the Third Mate, abruptly, from where he sat and steered. ‘I think it came from somewhere over to starboard.’

‘Damn this mist!’ said the Skipper. ‘Damn it! What a devil of a stink! Pass that other anchor-light forrard.’

I reached for the lamp, and handed it to the next man, who passed it on.

‘The other boat hook,’ said the Skipper; and when he’d got it, he lashed the lamp to the hook end, and then lashed the whole arrangement upright in the bows, so that the lamp was well above his head.

‘Now,’ he said. ‘Give way gently! And stand by to back water, if I tell you . . . Watch my hand, Mister,’ he added to the Third Mate. ‘Steer as I tell you.’

We rowed a dozen slow strokes, and with every stroke, I took a look over my shoulder. The Captain was leaning forward under the big lamp, with the bul’s-eye in one hand and his revolver in the other. He kept flashing the beam of the lantern up into the night.

‘Good Lord!’ he said, suddenly. ‘Vast pulling.’

We stopped, and I slewed round on the thwart, and stared.

He was standing up under the glow of the anchor light, and shining the bul’s-eye up at a great mass that loomed dully through the mist. As he flicked the light to and fro over the great bulk, I realised that the boat was within some three or four fathoms of the hull of a vessel.

‘Pull another stroke,’ the Skipper said, in a quiet voice, after a few minutes of silence. ‘Gently now! Gently! . . . Vast pulling!’

I slewed round again on my thwart and stared. I could see part of the thing quite distinctly now, and more of it, as I followed the beam of the Captain’s lantern. She was a vessel right enough, but such a vessel as I had never seen. She was extraordinarily high out of the water, and seemed very short, and rose up into a queer mass at one end. But what puzzled me more, I think, than anything else, was the queer look of her sides, down which water was streaming all the time.

‘That explains the sound of the water running,’ I thought to myself; ‘but what on earth is she built of?’

You will understand a little of my bewildered feelings, when I tell you that as the beam of the Captain’s lamp shone on the side of this queer vessel, it showed stone everywhere—as if she were built out of stone. I never felt so dumb-founded in my life.

‘She’s stone, Cap’n!’ I said. ‘Look at her, Sir!’

I realised, as I spoke, a certain horribleness, of the unnatural. . . . A



stone ship, floating out there in the night in the midst of the lonely Atlantic!

"She's stone," I said again, in that absurd way in which one reiterates, when one is bewildered.

"Look at the slime on her!" muttered the man next but one forward of me.

"She's a proper Davy Jones' ship. By gum! she stinks like a corpse."

"Ship ahoy!" roared the Skipper, at the top of his voice. "Ship ahoy! Ship ahoy!"

His shout beat back at us, in a curious, clank, yet metallic, echo, something the way one's voice sounds in an old disused quarry.

"There's no one aboard there, Sir," said the Third Mate. "Shall I put the boat alongside?"

"Yes, shove her up, Mister," said the Old Man. "Jill bottom this business. Pull a couple of strokes, aft there. In bow, and stand by to fend off."

The Third Mate laid the boat alongside, and we unshipped our oars.

Then, I leant forward over the side of the boat, and pressed the flat of my hand upon the stark side of the ship. The water that ran down her side, sprayed out over my hand and wrist in a cataract; but I did not think about being wet, for my hand was pressed solid upon stone. . . . I pulled my hand back with a queer feeling.

"She's stone, right enough, Sir," I said to the Captain.

"We'll soon see what she is," he said. "Shove your oar up against her side, and shin up. We'll pass the lamp up to you as soon as you're aboard. Have your axe in the back of your belt. I'll cover you with my gun, till you're aboard."

"Y. I. Sir," I said; though I felt a bit tummy at the thought of having to be the first aboard that damn rummy craft.

I put my oar upright against her side, and took a spring up it from the thwart, and in a moment I was grabbing over my head for her rail, with every rag on me soaked through with the water that was streaming down her, and spraying out over the oar and me.

I got a firm grip of the rail, and heaved my head high enough to look over, but I could see nothing—what with the darkness, and the water in my eyes.

I knew it was no time for going slow, if there were danger aboard, so I went in over that rail, in one spring, my boots coming down with a horrible, ringing, hollow, stony sound on her decks. I whipped the water out of my eyes and the axe out of my belt, all in the same moment; then I took a good stare fore and aft; but it was too dark to see anything.

"Come along, Duprey!" shouted the Skipper. "Collar the lamp."

I leant out sideways over the rail, and grabbed for the lamp with my left hand, keeping the axe ready in my right, and staring inboard, for I tell you, I was just mortally afraid in that moment of what might be aboard of her.

I felt the lamp ring with my left hand, and gripped it. Then I swatched it aboard, and turned fair and square to see where I'd gotten.

Now, you never saw such a packet as that, not in a hundred years, nor yet two hundred, I should think. She'd got a rum little main-deck, about forty feet long, and then came a step about two feet high, and another bit of a deck, with a little house on it.

That was the after end of her; and more I couldn't see, because the light of my lamp went no farther, except to show me vaguely the big, cocked-up stern of her, going up into the darkness. I never saw a vessel made like her; not even in an old picture of old-time ships.

Forrard of me, was her mast—a big lump of a stick it was too, for her size. And here was another amazing thing, the mast of her looked just solid stone.

'Funny, isn't she, Duprey?' said the Skipper's voice at my back, and I came round on him with a jump.

"Yes," I said. "I'm puzzled. Aren't you, Sir?"

"Well," he said, "I am. If we were like the shell-backs they talk of in books, we'd be crossing ourselves. But, personally, give me a good heavy Colt, or the hefty chunk of steel you're cuddling."

He turned from me, and put his head over the rail.

"Pass up the painter, Jales," he said, to the bow oar. Then to the Third Mate:—

'Bring 'em all up, Mister. If there's going to be anything rummy, we may as well make a picnic party of the lot. . . . Huh! that painter round the keel yonder, Duprey," he added to me. "It looks good solid stone! . . . That's right. Come along."

He swung the thin beam of his lantern fore and aft, and then forrard again.

"Lord!" he said. "Look at that mast. It's stone. Give it a whack with the back of your axe, man; only remember she's apparently a bit of an old-timer! So go gently."

I took my axe short, and tapped the mast, and it rang dull, and solid, like a stone pillar, I struck it again, harder, and a sharp flake of stone flew past my cheek. The Skipper thrust his lantern close up to where I'd struck the mast.

"By George," he said "she's absolute a stone ship—solid stone, afloat here out of Eternity, in the middle of the wide Atlantic. . . . Why! She must weigh a thousand tons more than she's buoyancy to carry. It's just impossible. . . . It's—"

He turned his head quickly, at a sound in the darkness along the decks. He flashed his light that way, across and across the after decks, but we could see nothing.

"Get a move on you in the boat!" he said sharply, stepping to the rail and looking down. "For once I'd really prefer a little more of your company. . . ." He came round like a flash, "Duprey, what was that?" he asked in a low voice.



"I certainly heard something, Sir," I said "I wish the others would hurry. By Jove! Look! What's that —"

"Where?" he said, and sent the beam of his lamp to where I pointed with my axe.

"There's nothing," he said, after circling the light all over the deck. "Don't go imagining things. There's enough solid unnatural fact here, without trying to add to it."

There came the splash and thud of feet behind, as the first of the men came up over the side, and jumped clumsily into the lee scuppers, which had water in them. You see she had a cant to that side, and I supposed the water had collected there.

The rest of the men followed, and then the Third Mate. That made six men of us, all well armed; and I felt a bit more comfortable, as you can think.

"Hold up that lamp of yours, Duprey, and lead the way," said the Skipper. "You're getting the post of honour this trip!"

"Y, y, Sir," I said, and stepped forward, holding up the lamp in my left hand, and carrying my axe half way down the hilt, in my right.

"We'll try aft, first," said the Captain, and led the way himself, flashing the bull's-eye to and fro. At the raised portion of the deck, he stopped.

"Now," he said, in his queer way, "let's have a look at this. . . . Tap it with your axe, Duprey. . . . Ah!" he added, as I hit it with the back of my axe. "That's what we call stone at home, right enough. She's just as rum as anything I've seen while I've been fishing. We'll go on aft and have a peep into the deck-house. Keep your axes handy, men."

We walked slowly up to the curious little house, the deck rising to it with quite a slope. At the fore-side of the little deck-house, the Captain pulled up, and shone his bull's-eye down at the deck. I saw that he was looking at what was plainly the stump of the after mast. He stepped closer to it, and kicked it with his foot; and it gave out the same dull, solid note that the foremast had done. It was obviously a chunk of stone.

I held up my lamp so that I could see the upper part of the house more clearly. The fore-part had two square window spaces in it; but there was no glass in either of them; and the blank darkness within the queer little place, just seemed to stare out at us.

And then I saw something suddenly . . . a great shaggy head of red hair was rising slowly into sight, through the port window, the one nearest to us.

"My God! What's that, Cap'n?" I called out. But it was gone, even as I spoke.

"What?" he asked, jumping at the way I had sung out.

"At the port window, Sir," I said. "A great red haired head. It came right up to the window-place; and then it went in a moment."

The Skipper stepped right up to the little dark window, and pushed

his lantern through into the blackness. He flashed a light round, then withdrew the lantern.

"Bosh, man!" he said. "That's twice you've got fancying things. Ease up your nerves a bit!"

"I did see it!" I said, almost angrily. "It was like a great red haired head. . . ."

"Stow it, Duprey!" he said, though not sneeringly. "The house is absolutely empty. Come round to the door, if the Infernal Masons that built her, went in for doors! Then you'll see for yourself. All the same, keep your axes ready, lads. I've a notion there's something pretty queer aboard here."

We went up round the after end of the little house, and here we saw what appeared to be a door.

The Skipper felt at the queer, odd shapen handle, and pushed at the door; but it had stuck fast.

"Here, one of you!" he said, stepping back. "Have a whack at this with your axe. Better use the back."

One of the men stepped forward, and we stood away to give him room. As his axe struck, the door went to pieces with exactly the same sound that a thin slab of stone would make, when broken.

"Stone!" I heard the Captain mutter, under his breath. "By Gum! What is she?"

I did not wait for the Skipper. He had put me a bit on edge, and I stepped bang in through the open doorway, with the lamp high, and holding my axe short and ready; but there was nothing in the place, save a stone seat running all round, except where the doorway opened on to the deck.

"Find your red-haired monster?" asked the Skipper, at my elbow.

I said nothing. I was suddenly aware that he was all on the jump with some inexplicable fear. I saw his glance going everywhere about him. And then his eye caught mine, and he saw that I realised. He was a man almost callous to fear, that is the fear of danger in what I might call any normal sea-faring shape. And this palpable nerviness affected me tremendously. He was obviously doing his best to throttle it, and trying all he knew to hide it. I had a sudden warmth of understanding for him, and dreaded lest the men should realise his state. Funny that I should be able at that moment to be aware of anything but my own bewildered fear and expectancy of intruding upon something monstrous at any instant. Yet I describe exactly my feelings, as I stood there in the house.

"Shall we try below, Sir?" I said, and turned to where a flight of stone steps led down into an utter blackness, out of which rose a strange, dank scent of the sea . . . an imponderable mixture of brine and darkness.

"The worthy Duprey leads the van!" said the Skipper; but I felt no irritation now. I knew that he must cover his fright, until he had got control again; and I think he felt, somehow, that I was backing him up. I remember now that I went down those stairs into that unknowable and



ancient cabin, as much aware in that moment of the Captain's state, as of that extraordinary thing I had just seen at the little window, or of my own half tunk of what we might see any moment.

The Captain was at my shoulder, as I went, and behind him came the Third Mate, and then the men, all in single file, for the stairs were narrow.

I counted seven steps down, and then my foot splashed into water on the eighth. I held the lamp low and stared. I had caught no glimpse of a reflection, and I saw now that this was owing to a curious, dull, greyish scum that lay thinly on the water, seeming to match the colour of the stone which composed the steps and bulkheads.

"Stop!" I said, "I'm in water!"

I let my foot down slowly, and got the next step. Then sounded with my axe, and found the floor at the bottom. I stepped down and stood up to my thighs in water.

"It's all right, Sir," I said, suddenly whispering. I held my lamp up, and glanced quickly about me.

"It's not deep. There's two doors here. . . ."

I whirled my axe up as I spoke; for suddenly, I had realised that one of the doors was open a little. It seemed to move, as I stared, and I could have imagined that a vague undulation ran towards me, across the dull scum-covered water.

"The door's opening!" I said, aloud, with a sudden sick feeling. "Look out!"

I backed from the door, staring; but nothing came. And abruptly, I had control of myself; for I realised that the door was not moving. It had not moved at all. It was simply ajar.

"It's all right, sir," I said. "It's not opening."

I stepped forward again a pace towards the doors, as the skipper and the Third Mate came down with a jump, splashing the water all over me.

The Captain still had the "nerves" on him, as I think I could see, even then; but he hid it well.

"Try the door, Mister. I've jumped my damn lamp out!" he growled to the Third Mate; who pushed at the door on my right; but it would not open beyond the nine or ten inches it was fixed ajar.

"There's this one here, Sir," I whispered, and held my lantern up to the closed door that lay on my left.

"Try it," said the Skipper in an undertone. We did so, but it also was fixed. I whirled my axe suddenly, and struck the door heavily in the centre of the main panel, and the whole thing crashed into flinders of stone, that went with hollow sounding splashes into the darkness beyond.

"Goodness!" said the Skipper in a startled voice; for my action had been so instant and unexpected. He covered his lapse, in a moment, by the warning:—

"Look out for bad air!" But I was already inside with the lamp, and holding my axe handily. There was no bad air, for right across from me,

was a spit clean through the ship's side, that I could have put my two arms through, just above the level of the scummy water.

The place I had broken into, was a cabin, or a kind; but seemed strange and dank, and too narrow to breathe in, and wherever I turned, I saw none. The Third Mate and the Skipper gave simultaneous expressions of disgust at the wet dismalness of the place.

'It's all stone,' I said, and brought my axe hard against the front of a sort of squat cabinet, which was built into the after bulkhead. It caved in, with a crash of splintered stone.

"Empty!" I said, and turned instantly away.

The Skipper and the Third Mate, with the men who were now peering in at the door, crowded out; and in that moment, I pushed my axe under my arm, and thrust my hand into the burst stone-chest. Twice I did this, with almost the speed of lightning and shoved what I had seen, into the side pocket of my coat. Then, I was following the others; and not one of them had noticed a thing. As for me, I was quivering with excitement, so that my knees shook; for I had caught the unmistakable gleam of gems; and had grabbed for them in that one swift instant.

I wonder whether anyone can realise what I felt in that moment. I knew that, if my guess were right, I had snatched the power in that one miraculous moment, that would lift me from the weary life of a common shellback, to the life of ease that had been mine during my early years. I tell you, in that instant, as I staggered almost blindly out of that dark little apartment, I had no thought of any horror that might be held in that incredible vessel, out there afloat on the wide Atlantic.

I was full of the one blinding thought, that possibly I was *rich*! And I wanted to get somewhere by myself as soon as possible, to see whether I was right. Also, if I could, I meant to get back to that strange cabinet of stone, if the chance came; for I knew that the two handiars I had grabbed, had left a lot behind.

Only, whatever I did, I must let no one guess. For then I should probably lose everything, or have but an infinitesimal share doled out to me, of the wealth that I believed to be in those glittering things there in the side-pocket of my coat.

I began immediately to wonder what other treasures there might be aboard, and then, abruptly, I realised that the Captain was speaking to me:—

"The light, Duprey, damn you!" he was saying, angrily, in a low tone. "What's the matter with you! Hold it up."

I paled myself together, and shoved the lamp above my head. One of the men was swinging his axe, to beat in the door that seemed to have stood so eternally ajar; and the rest were standing back, to give him room. Crash! went the axe, and half the door fell inward, in a shower of broken stone, making dismal splashes in the darkness. The man struck again, and the rest of the door fell away, with a sullen slump into the water.

"The lamp," muttered the Captain. But I had hold of myself once more.



and I was stepping forward slowly through the thigh deep water, even before he spoke.

I went a couple of paces in through the black gape of the doorway and then stopped and held the lamp so as to get a view of the place. As I did so, I remember how the intense silence struck home on me. Every man of us must surely have been holding his breath; and there must have been some heavy quality, either in the water, or in the scum that floated on it, that kept it from rippling against the sides of the bulkheads, with the movements we had made.

At first, as I held the lamp (which was burning badly), I could not get its position right to show me anything, except that I was in a very large cabin for so small a vessel. Then I saw that a table ran along the centre, and the top of it was no more than a few inches above the water. On each side of it, there rose the backs of what were evidently two rows of massive, olden looking chairs. At the far end of the table, there was a huge, immobile, humped something.

I stared at this for several moments; then I took three slow steps forward, and stopped again; for the thing resolved itself, under the light from the lamp, into the figure of an enormous man, seated at the end of the table, his face bowed forward upon his arms. I was amazed, and thrilling abruptly with new fears and vague impossible thoughts. Without moving a step, I held the light nearer at arm's length. . . . The man was of stone, like everything in that extraordinary ship.

"That foot!" said the Captain's voice, suddenly cracking. "Look at that foot!" His voice sounded amazingly startling and hollow in that silence, and the words seemed to come back sharply at me from the vaguely seen bulkheads.

I whipped my light to starboard, and saw what he meant—a huge human foot was sticking up out of the water, on the right hand side of the table. It was enormous. I have never seen so vast a foot. And it also was of stone.

And then, as I stared, I saw that there was a great head above the water, over by the bulkhead.

"I've gone mad!" I said, out loud, as I saw something else, more incredible.

"My God! Look at the hair on the head!" said the Captain. . . . "It's growing!" he called out once more.

I was looking. On the great head, there was becoming visible a huge mass of red hair, that was surely and unmistakably rising up, as we watched it.

"It's what I saw at the window!" I said. "It's what I saw at the window! I told you I saw it!"

"Come out of that, Duprey," said the Third Mate, quietly.

"Let's get out of here!" muttered one of the men. Two or three of them called out the same thing; and then, in a moment, they began a mad rush up the stairway.

I stood dumb, where I was. The hair rose up in a horrible living fashion on the great head, waving and moving. It rippled down over the forehead, and spread abruptly over the whole gargantuan stone face, hiding the features completely. Suddenly, I swore at the thing madly, and I hove my axe at it. Then I was backing crazily for the door, slumping the scum as high as the deck-beams. In my fierce haste, I reached the stairs, and caught at the stone rail, that was modelled like a rope, and so hove myself up out of the water. I reached the little deck-house, where I had seen the great head of hair. I jumped through the doorway, out on to the decks, and I felt the night air sweet on my face. . . . Goodness! I ran forward along the decks. There was a babel of shouting in the waist of the ship, and a cludding of feet running. Some of the men were singing out, to get into the boat, but the Third Mate was shouting that they must wait for me.

"He's coming," called someone. And then I was among them.

"Turn that lamp up, you idiot," said the Captain's voice. "This is just where we want light!"

I glanced down, and realised that my lamp was almost out. I turned it up, and it flared, and began again to dwindle.

"Those damned boys never filed it," I said. "They deserve their necks breaking."

The men were literally tumbling over the side, and the Skipper was hurrying them.

"Down with you into the boat," he said to me. "Give me the lamp. I'll pass it down. Get a move on you!"

The Captain had evidently got his nerve back again. This was more like the man I knew. I handed him the lamp, and went over the side. All the rest had now gone, and the Third Mate was already in the stern, waiting.

As I landed on the thwart, there was a sudden, strange noise from aboard the ship—a sound, as if some stone object were trundling down the sloping decks from aft. In that one moment, I got what you might truly call the "horrors." I seemed suddenly able to believe incredible possibilities.

"The stone men!" I shouted. "Jump, Captain! Jump! Jump!" The vessel seemed to roll oddly.

Abruptly, the Captain yelled out something, that not one of us in the boat understood. There followed a succession of tremendous sounds, aboard the ship, and I saw his shadow swing out huge against the thin mist, as he turned suddenly with the lamp. He fired twice with his revolver.

"The hair!" I shouted. "Look at the hair!"

We all saw it—the great head of red hair that we had seen grow visibly on the monstrous stone head, below in the cabin. It rose above the rail, and there was a moment of intense stillness, in which I heard the Captain gasping. The Third Mate fired six times at the thing, and I found myself fixing an oar up against the side of that abominable vessel, to get aboard.

As I did so, there came one appalling crash, that shook the stone ship fore and aft, and she began to cant up, and my oar snapped and fell into the



boat. Then the Captain's voice came in a choking fashion above us. The ship lurched forward and poised. Then another crash came, and she rocked over towards us, then away from us again. The movement away from us continued, and the round of the vessel's bottom showed, vaguely. There was a smashing of glass above us, and the dim glow of light aboard vanished. Then the vessel fell clean over from us, with a giant splash. A huge wave came at us, out of the night, and half filled the boat.

The boat nearly capsized, then righted and presently steadied.

"Captain!" shouted the Third Mate. "Captain!" But there came never a sound; only presently, out of all the night, a strange murmuring of waters.

"Captain!" he shouted once more; but his voice just went lost and remote into the darkness.

"She's foundered!" I said.

"Out oars," sung out the Third. "Put your backs into it. Don't stop to bail!"

For half an hour we circled the spot slowly. But the strange vessel had indeed foundered and gone down into the mystery of the deep sea, with her mysteries.

Finally we put about, and returned to the *Alfred Jessop*.

Now, I want you to realize that what I am telling you is a plain and simple tale of fact. This is no fairy tale, and I've not done yet; and I think this yarn should prove to you that some mighty strange things do happen at sea, and always will while the world lasts. It's the home of all the mysteries; for it's the one place that is really difficult for humans to investigate. Now just listen:—

The Mate had kept the bell going, from time to time, and so we came back pretty quickly, having as we came, a strange repetition of the echoey reduplication of our oar sounds; but we never spoke a word, for not one of us wanted to hear those beastly echoes again, after what we had just gone through. I think we all had a feeling that there was something a bit hellish abroad that night.

We got aboard, and the Third explained to the Mate what had happened, but he would hardly believe the yarn. However, there was nothing to do, but wait for daylight, so we were told to keep about the deck, and keep our eyes and ears open.

One thing the Mate did showed he was more impressed by our yarn than he would admit. He had all the ships' lanterns lashed up round the decks, to the sneerpoles, and he never told us to give up either the axes or the cutlass.

It was while we were keeping about the decks, that I took the chance to have a look at what I had grabbed. I tell you, what I found, made me nearly forget the Skipper, and all the rummy things that had happened. I had twenty-six stones in my pocket and four of them were diamonds, respectively 9, 11, 13, and 17 carats in weight, uncut, that is. I know quite something about diamonds. I'm not going to tell you how I learnt what I know; but I would not have taken a thousand pounds for the four, as they lay there, in my hand. There was also a big, dull stone, that looked red inside. I'd have camped it

over the side, I thought so little of it; only, I argued that it must be some thing, or it would never have been among that lot, Lord! but I little knew what I'd got, not then. Why, the thing was as big as a fair sized walnut. You may think it funny that I thought of the four diamonds first; but you see, I *know* diamonds when I see them. They're things I understand, but I never saw a ruby, in the rough, before or since. Good Lord! And to think I'd have thought nothing of heaving it over the side!

You see, a lot of the stones were not anything much; that is, not in the modern market. There were two big topaz, and several onyx and cornelians—nothing much. There were five hammered slugs of gold about two ounces each they would be. And then a prize—one winking green devil of an emerald. You've got to know an emerald to look for the "eye" of it, in the rough, but it is there—the eye of some hidden devil staring up at you. Yes, I'd seen an emerald before, and I knew I held a lot of money in that one stone alone.

And then I remembered what I'd missed, and cursed myself for not grabbing a third time. But that feeling lasted only a moment. I thought of the beastly part that had been the Skipper's share; while there I stood safe under one of the lamps, with a fortune in my hands. And then, abruptly, as you can understand, my mind was filled with the crazy wonder and bewilderment of what had happened. I felt how absurdly ineffectual my imagination was to comprehend anything understandable out of it all, except that the Captain had certainly gone, and I had just as certainly had a piece of impossible luck.

Often, during that time of waiting, I stopped to take a look at the things I had in my pocket; always careful that no one about the decks should come near me, to see what I was looking at.

Suddenly the Mate's voice came saarp along the decks:

"Call the doctor, one of you," he said. "Tell him to get the fire on and the coffee made."

"'i, Sir," said one of the men; and I realized that the dawn was growing vaguely over the sea.

Half an hour later, the "doctor" shoved his head out of the galley door-way, and sung out that coffee was ready.

The watch below turned out, and had theirs with the watch on deck, all sitting along the spar that lay under the port rail.

As the daylight grew, we kept a constant watch over the side, but even now we could see nothing, for the thin mist still hung low on the sea.

"Hear that?" said one of the men, suddenly. And, indeed, the sound must have been plain for half a mile round.

"Ooaaze, ooaaze, arrrr, arrrr, ooaaze—"

By George! said Tallett—one of the other watch, "that's a beastly sort of thing to hear."

"Look!" I said, "What's that out yonder?"

The mist was thinning under the effect of the rising sun, and tremendous



shapes seemed to stand towering half-seen, away to port. A few minutes passed, while we stared. Then, suddenly, we heard the Mate's voice —

"All hands on deck!" he was shouting, along the decks.

I ran aft a few steps.

"Both watches are out, Sir," I called.

"Very good!" said the Mate. "Keep handy all of you. Some of you have got the axes. The rest had better take a capstan bar each, and stand by till I find what this devilment is, out yonder."

"Y, y, Sir," I said, and turned forward. But there was no need to pass on the Mate's orders; for the men had heard, and there was a rush for the capstan-bars, which are a pretty hefty kind of cudgel, as any sailorman knows. We lined the rail again, and stared away to port.

"Look out, you sea devils," shouted Timothy Galt, a huge Irishman, waving his bar excitedly, and peering over the rail into the mist, which was steadily thinning, as the day grew.

Abruptly there was a simultaneous cry — "*Rocks!*" shouted everyone.

I never saw such a sight. As at last the mist thinned, we could see them. All the sea to port was literally cut about with far-reaching reefs of rock. In places the reefs lay just submerged; but in others they rose into extraordinary and fantastic rock spires, and arches, and islands of jagged rock.

"Jenosaphat!" I heard the Third Mate shout. "Look at that, Mister! Look at that! Lord! how did we take the boat through that, without stoving her!"

Everything was so still for the moment, with all the men just staring and amazed, that I could hear every word come along the decks.

"There's sure been a submarine earthquake somewhere," I heard the First Mate say. "The bottom of the sea's just riz up here, quiet and gentle, during the night; and God's mercy we aren't now a-top of one of those ornaments out there."

And then, you know, I saw it all. Everything that had looked mad and impossible, began to be natural, though it was, none the less, all amazing and wonderful.

There had been during the night, a slow lifting of the sea bottom, owing to some action of the Internal Pressures. The rocks had risen so gently that they had made never a sound; and the stone ship had risen with them out of the deep sea. She had evidently lain on one of the submerged reefs, and so had seemed to us to be just afloat in the sea. And she accounted for the water we heard running. She was naturally bung full, as you might say, and took longer to shed the water than she did to rise. She had probably some biggish holes in her bottom. I began to get my "soundings" a bit, as I might call it in sailor talk. The natural wonders of the sea beat all made-up yarns that ever were!

The Mate sung out to us to man the boat again, and told the Third Mate to take her out to where we lost the Skipper, and have a final look round, in case there might be any chance to find the Old Man's body anywhere about.

"Keep a man in the bows to look out for sunk rocks, Mister," the Mate told

the Third, as we pulled off "Go slow. There'll be no wind yet awhile. See if you can fix up what made those noises, while you're looking round."

We pulled right across about thirty fathoms of clear water, and in a minute we were between two great arches of rock. It was then I realized that the replicating of our oar roll was the echo from these on each side of us. Even in the sunlight, it was queer to hear again that same strange cathedral echoey sound that we had heard in the dark.

We passed under the huge arches, all hung with deep-sea slime. And presently we were heading straight for a gap, where two low reefs swept in to the apex of a huge horseshoe. We pulled for about three minutes, and then the Third gave the word to vast pulling.

"Take the boat hook, Duprey," he said, "and go forrard, and see we don't hit anything."

"i, i, Sir," I said, and drew in my oar.

"Give way again gently!" said the Third; and the boat moved forward for another thirty or forty yards.

"We're right on to a reef, Sir," I said, presently, as I stared down over the bows. I sounded with the boat hook. "There's about three feet of water, Sir," I told him.

"Vast pulling," ordered the Third. "I reckon we are right over the rock, where we found that rum packet last night." He leant over the side, and stared down.

"There's a stone cannon on the rock, right under the bows of the boat," I said. Immediately afterwards I shouted—

"There's the hair, Sir! There's the hair! It's on the reef. There's two! There's three! There's one on the cannon!"

"All right! All right, Duprey! Keep cool," said the Third Mate. "I can see them. You've enough intelligence not to be superstitious now the whole thing's explained. They're some kind of big hairy sea-caterpillar. Prod one with your boat-hook."

I did so; a little ashamed of my sudden bewilderment. The thing whipped round like a tiger, at the boat hook. It lapped itself round and round the boat-hook, while the hind portions of it kept gripped to the rock, and I could no more pull the boat hook from its grip, than fly, though I pulled till I sweated.

"Take the point of your cutlass to it, Varley," said the Third Mate. "Jab it through."

The bow-oar did so, and the brute loosed the boat-hook, and curled up round a chunk of rock, looking like a great ball of red hair.

I drew the boat-hook up, and examined it.

"Goodness!" I said. "That's what killed the Old Man—one of those things! Look at all those marks in the wood, where it's gripped it with about a hundred legs."

I passed the boat hook aft to the Third Mate to look at.

"They're about as dangerous as they can be, Sir, I reckon," I told him.



"Makes you think of African centipedes, only these are big and strong enough to kill an elephant, I should think."

"Don't lean all on one side of the boat!" shouted the Third Mate, as the men stared over. "Get back to your places. Give way, there! . . . Keep a good look-out for any signs of the ship or the Captain, Duprey."

For nearly an hour, we pulled to and fro over the reef; but we never saw either the stone ship or the Old Man again. The queer craft must have rolled off into the profound depths that lay on each side of the reef.

As I leant over the bows, staring down all that long while at the submerged rocks, I was able to understand almost everything, except the various extraordinary noises.

The cannon made it unmistakably clear that the ship which had been hove up from the sea bottom, with the rising of the reef, had been originally a normal enough wooden vessel of a time far removed from our own. At the sea bottom, she had evidently undergone some natural mineralizing process, and this explained her stony appearance. The stone men had been evidently humans who had been drowned in her cabin, and their swollen tissues had been subjected to the same natural process, which, however, had also deposited heavy encrustations upon them, so that their size, when compared with the normal, was prodigious.

The mystery of the hair, I had already discovered; but there remained, among other things, the tremendous bangs we had heard. These were, possibly, explained later, while we were making a final examination of the rocks to the westward, prior to returning to our ship. Here we discovered the burst and swollen bodies of several extraordinary deep sea creatures, of the eel variety. They must have had a girth, in life, of many feet, and one that we measured roughly with an oar, must have been quite forty feet long. They had, apparently, burst on being lifted from the tremendous pressure of the deep sea, into the light air pressure above water, and hence might account for the loud reports we had heard, though, personally, I incline to think these loud bangs were more probably caused by the splitting of the rocks under new stresses.

As for the roaring sounds, I can only conclude that they were caused by a peculiar species of grampus-like fish, of enormous size, which we found dead and hugely distended on one of the rocky masses. This fish must have weighed at least four or five tons, and when prodded with a heavy oar, there came from its peculiar snout shaped mouth, a low, hoarse sound, like a weak imitation of the tremendous sounds we had heard during the past night.

Regarding the apparently carved handrail, like a rope up the side of the cabin stairs, I realize that this had undoubtedly been actual rope at one time.

Recalling the heavy trundling sounds aboard, just after I climbed down into the boat, I can only suppose that these were made by some stone object, possibly a fossilized gun-carriage, rolling down the decks, as the ship began to slip off the rocks, and her bows sank lower in the water.

The varying lights must have been the strongly phosphorescent bodies of

some of the deep sea creatures, moving about on the upheaved reefs. As for the giant splash that occurred in the darkness ahead of the boat, this must have been due to some large portion of heaved-up rock, overbalancing and rolling back into the sea.

No one aboard ever learnt about the jewels. I took care of that! I sold the ruby badly, so I've heard since, but I do not grumble even now. Twenty three thousand pounds I had for it alone, from a merchant in London. I learned afterwards he made double that on it; but I don't spoil my pleasure by grumbling. I wonder often how the stones and things came where I found them; but she carried guns, as I've told, I think, and there's rum doings happen at sea; yes, by George!

The smell—oh that I guess was due to heaving all that deep-sea sludge up for human noses to smell at.

This yarn is, of course, known in nautical circles, and was briefly mentioned in the old *Nautical Mercury* of 1879. The series of volcanic reefs (which disappeared in 1883) were charted under the name of the "Alfred Jessop Shoals and Reefs", being named after our Captain who discovered them and lost his life on them.



## *Child's Play*

*by Alice-Mary Schnirring*

*Everyone familiar with children knows the phenomenon of the imaginary playmate. The brains of children, being evidently far more imaginatively flexible, carry on the creation and development of invisible companions to an extent adults cannot conceive of. In some gifted cases, such as the Brontës, the creations of childhood encompassed whole worlds of people and events . . . out of which in the case of the authors of "Wuthering Heights" and "Jane Eyre" came great adult literature. In this different story of the operations of this psychological phenomenon comes a sense of growing uneasiness and culminating terror.*



HENRY bent lower over the drawing-board as the twilight deepened. With a dark red crayon, he filled in the outlines of another city, then, with a pen dipped in India ink, drew—rapidly and with remarkable delicacy and skill for a twelve year-old—a temple, a palace, and a barracks; and sketched in hastily some ambiguous dwelling places. He muttered to himself as he worked.

"This'll keep old Charley Anderson in his place, I bet," was the tenor of his mumblings. "His barracks only have room for about two hundred warriors, and my Royal Guards can clean them up with one hand tied behind their backs. Anyway, the Thorvians are a bunch of sissies." In large letters, he labeled the city "THORVIA," and sat back with a little smile on his face, wiggling his fingers to uncramp them.

A voice called from somewhere downstairs. "Hen reeee. Hen reeee! Your dinner is ready! Why aren't you ever around to help me set the table or anything, instead of sulking up in your room all the time? Why—" the voice trailed off into peevish, whining incoherencies. The boy stood up, scowling; but prepared, laggingly, to go downstairs. He paused, however, for one more look at the map.

It was drawn with remarkable precision. It appeared to be a map of a mountainous country, dominated by one large city, built on the top and upper

slopes of the highest of the mountains. This city, marked "DRACO," was elaborately and painstakingly developed with the little India ink symbols. A truly magnificent palace was at its very heart, and around the palace, cunningly enough, were strong barracks, each with a watch-tower. Beyond these, again, was a very wide, bare, circular road, completely surrounding barracks, palace, gardens and all. Apparently the ruler of this kingdom had a healthy distrust of his subjects, or else expected, but was prepared for, an invasion.

The remainder of the map bore out the second theory, for Draco was the heart of a whole system of smaller cities, or states. Since each city had a palace (though none as impressive as the one in Draco), the effect was that of a feudal overlord, surrounded by lesser rulers. So, in fact, was the case. Henry, who dragged out a dreary existence with his aunt and uncle—an existence complicated by the limp which he would always have, as a souvenir of the accident in which his mother and father had been killed—had found that in order to make life with the other boys of his age bearable, he would have to make himself superior to them. Since any physical superiority was out of the question, his quick mind had found the way out.

As Kirwan, ruler of Draco and its subject states, Henry held a position of unquestioned authority among his fellows. More—the game had captured their imaginations to such an extent that former, and possibly healthier, pastimes were neglected. Billy Daniels (Fiero, Prince of Maglar), Donny Clark (Andrus of Ghuria); Joe Domenico (Horvath of Bacur); and Robin Johnson (Duke Shura, of Friya), lived only for the campaigns against the Dog-Men of the Outer Mountains, the internecine wars that troubled Draconia with scarcely a let-up, and, of course, the political strife that was one of its chief reasons d'être. In turn, each one had tried to out-manuever Henry; but Kirwan, King of Draconia, had maintained his power against each of them, and his ascendancy over their minds at the same time. "The game," however, held even more sway over Henry than over the others. More and more, his life as Henry Booth seemed the game, and a very unpleasant and dull game, at that; while, as Kirwan, he lived in a dangerously brilliant world, of which every corner was twice as familiar to him as the drab surroundings of his Aunt Martha's and Uncle Joe's house.

Aunt Martha and Uncle Joe were not fond of Henry, to start with. He didn't act nicely at all to their dear little Charley (about to become ruler of Thorvia), and Charley such a bright little fellow—and so healthy! Imagine—100 pounds, and only eleven years old!

That, of course, was one way of looking at it—the Anderson's way. Henry's way was, quite simply, that Charley was a big overgrown slob of a boy, and a nasty little sneak and bully besides. Henry's views were actually far less biased than those of his aunt and uncle. In fact, the only reason for the creation of "Thorvia" was that Charley had prowled, and sneaked, and opened bureau drawers, and listened in corners to too good effect. Briefly, Charley knew too much, and, in his inimitable way, could break up the game with



dreadful ease—but even his calculating, disagreeable little mind recognized its pull, and a Dukedom was the price of his cooperation.

All this passed vaguely and hastily through Kirwan's mind, as he lingered in the doorway, still under the spell of his own creation. It was Kirwan who frowned, standing there, foreseeing trouble with his latest vassal lord; it was Kirwan who suddenly went back to the drawing board, took up the Indian ink again, and quickly sketched something in the southeastern corner of Thorvia. But it was Henry who dropped pen and ink, nervously and ran to the door and down the stairs, at a repetition of the whining cry, "Henryyyyy!" from downstairs.

He sat through an unattractive meal of boiled potatoes, cabbage, and a very poor grade of chopped beef, topped off by a bread pudding that was mostly bread. What raisins there were, went to Charley; who had also engulped the lion's share of the chopped beef. Quantity, not quality, was his motto; and glands alone were not responsible for the hundred pounds that were Charley.

The meal was enlivened by Aunt Martha's monologue, mostly based on Henry, and never complimentary to him; with variations on Charley's virtues and good, healthy appetite—so different from Henry, picking at his food, as if he shouldn't be grateful to his dear auntie and uncle who provided his food, at what expense no one knew, and look how Charley likes to play outdoors—not always frowning in his room, when he wasn't in corners with those other boys—and just what was it they did, anyway? Aunt Martha thought that she and Mrs. Daniels and Mrs. Clark and Mrs. Domenico (though Mrs. Domenico was not really a lady, to Aunt Martha's way of thinking, though doubtless a good-hearted woman), and Mrs. Johnson ought to get together and find out just what was going on. You didn't see Aunt Martha's Charley—

Panic, that had been growing in Henry as this speech rose to its crisis, flowered into speech.

"It's—it's just a club, Aunt Martha," he stammered, rashly.

"Just a club?" she smiled. "And what kind of a club is it that is too good for my Charley?"

Henry's panic subsided. This emergency had already been faced, and dealt with. He even smiled.

"Why, we elected Charley a member at the last meeting, Aunt Martha," he said, looking at Charley. Charley's face, which had worn a greasy, knowing smile, suddenly took on a look of surprise, mingled with disbelief. He stared at Henry.

"Ya did?" Astonishment and—yes, pleasure—even normal, little boy pleasure, characterized his tone.

"Yes, Charley. You're a full fledged member of—the club now. Tell you about it after dinner.

Aunt Martha was not going to give up quite so easily, although it was easy to see that she was mollified.

"Well, I want to know more about it before I let Charley join, anyway," she said firmly. But Uncle Joe, for once stood up to her.

"Now, Martha—boys' clubs are secret. Can't expect 'em to tell you about what goes on. Leave the kids alone."

"Well, I can trust Charley," said Aunt Martha, fondly, giving in at last.

"I know Mother's little man wouldn't belong to any club that wasn't nice."

Charley smiled, as unpleasant a smile as Henry ever remembered seeing, even on Charley's face, and replied in a sick sweet voice, "Yes, Mamina dear."

They rose from the table, and Charley grabbed Henry by the arm and pulled him outdoors, into the spring night.

"Hurry up!" he said, feverishly. "If ya didn't mean it, I'm gonna tell everybody the whole thing. Didja mean it, really? Have I got a kingdom of my own in Draconia? What's its name? Where is it? How big—"

Henry was Kirwan. "Quiet!" he said. "My lords and I meet in conference tonight. You will be inducted into our company as Duke of Thorvia. As is our custom, you may choose your own name by which you will henceforth be known to us in Draconia. Be ready at midnight." Shaking his arm loose from the fat, wet grasp of his newest Duke, King Kirwan lumped away down the street.

At a quarter to twelve, Kirwan, King of Draconia, sat in the palace in the heart of Draco, his principal city, surrounded by his liege lords, the Prince Fiero of Maglar, Prince Andrus of Ghuria, Prince Horvath of Balcur, and Duke Shira of Friya. All of them looked troubled, Fiero and Shira downright furious.

"Kirwan," spoke up Fiero. "I crave leave to speak."

"Speak," said Kirwan, not looking up.

"I like not this new dukedom. It bounds Maglar all along my northeastern border, and this new Duke is a trouble-maker."

"And a slimy louse," said Duke Shira, fervently. "As the only other Duke of this company, one who has not yet attained his Prince-ship, I respectfully plead, O Kirwan, that you make him less than a Duke. I would not be akin to him even in title."

Kirwan looked up, finally. It was noticeable that his eyes blazed with excitement, mingled with a look of uncertainty. "Am I not your liege lord," he said, though not angrily. "And do you not trust me?"

"We trust you, Kirwan," said dark-eyed Horvath, who had not spoken before.

"But we know thisa new Duke is trouble-maker. We can control heem in Draconia, yes—but outside?"

For a moment, Kirwan hesitated, then he spoke slowly and hesitantly. "I think—I think I can control him outside, as well. I have a plan—"

The new Duke of Thorvia, Edric by name, was proving a trouble-maker. And Kirwan's liege lords, who had expected this, but believed that Kirwan could handle it, were becoming mutinous. First, Edric had shown a tendency to ridicule the whole secret life of Draconia; but after a couple of weeks, he



had become as absorbed by it as the rest. Then, however, the greed that was the cornerstone of his whole character, had begun to come to the fore. The marvelously intricate details of the whole country—the peasants' huts, the different uniforms of the fighting men in the service of each ruler; their number and character—even their names; the strange flowers in the garden of the palace at Draco; the unpleasant call of a certain bird found only in the unexplored woods of Ghuria; and the revolting characteristics of the pale fawn-colored mink-like animal that the Friyans had tried, unsuccessfully, to exterminate, Edric, with a surprising quickness, had learned them all, and even added to his fellow-lords' knowledge.

What puzzled Edric, sometimes (or, rather, it puzzled Charley Anderson) was the fact that it did not seem to him that he invented the things. It seemed rather as if they had always been there, in the back of his mind, and had just come casually to the fore. Even more strange—and when Charley thought of it, he was uneasy, although to Edric it was more a sullen annoyance than a surprise—was that Kirwan knew still more than Edric and, once or twice, had corroborated Edric's descriptions with certain emendations—*which Edric somehow realized were correct.*

There was the night when Horvath had entertained them in his palace at Bakar. The Dog Men had been quiescent for some weeks, and conversation was idly turning on the swamp-lands in the southeastern corner of Thorvia, unfamiliar territory, except for such features as Edric's palace, the barracks, and the peasants' huts, to most of the group. Edric was saying, "There must be mineral springs underground in the swamp. It—it sort of churns around, sometimes; but not always in the same place."

Kirwan had a small, secret smile on his face. "Not always the same place, no," he agreed. "But I think you will find always the same *sort* of place."

"Whatta you mean, the same sort of place?" Edric demanded, puzzled; "The whole swamp is the same sort of place. And I don't know why I should have to have a swamp in Thorvia—nobody else has. And this one has a nasty smell, somehow." He stopped short, realizing with an unexplained thrill of fear that it *did* have a nasty smell. But how could it have? And how did he know it, and know that he wasn't "making it up"? His mind was so absorbed by this rather frightening problem that he almost missed Kirwan's answer.

"It only—er—churns around near those dark purple waterlilies, doesn't it?" said Kirwan, mildly; yet with a gleam of almost uncontrollable excitement in his eyes. "What?" said Edric, and thought, "Yes," he said, and then with more conviction, "Yes. Only by the purple flowers." Then, jumping up, and with his voice shrill, "Why? What is it? You know what it is. How do you know?"

Kirwan cast down his eyes to the map, which he always took with him to the meetings. "Why, mineral springs, as you suggested," he answered. "That's what makes the swamp smell, probably, too. As for its only being near the

flowers, why, it's the other way around. The flowers grow there because there's some quality in the springs that feeds them."

Edric was almost satisfied with this explanation. But back in his bed, later that night, Charley Anderson still lay awake, and thought, and thought. And his thoughts came to fruition a week later.

It was in the middle of a discussion at the dinner-table—the usual discussion of why Henry wasn't eating his lambstew, but this time flavored with the unusual spice of the fact that Charley was only picking at his.

"It's that dratted club of yours," pronounced Aunt Martha. "It's got to stop. You, Charley, you've been mooning around the house now almost as bad as Henry, for goodness knows how long. Just what is this club, anyway?"

Charley cast a side-long look at Henry, who was looking at him with a strange expression—a waiting sort of look. Charley squirmed in his chair, uneasily. "Oh—it's just a club," he answered, sullenly; "Ya can't tell about it while you're in it. But they haven't been treating me right, and I think I'll resign—and then, Mamma, I'll tell you all about it." As he spoke the last words he looked straight at Henry, with a sly, triumphant expression, that said even more plainly than words, "See? I have you in a cleft stick. Either you knuckle under to me, or—"

Henry looked back at him, with an unreadable gleam in his eyes. Or was it Kirwan who looked back at him? Charley—Edric—found himself unable to decide, but something made him say, quickly, "Of course, if they're nicer to me, I won't resign—and then I couldn't tell."

"There, Henry," said Aunt Martha. "I *knew* you were being mean to poor little Charley. You're jealous of him, that's what it is; because you're a cripple and he's a big strong, clever boy. Either you treat him right, or I'll break up that club of yours—and I mean it!"

Henry looked at his plate. His nostrils flared, but he said absolutely nothing for a minute. Then he looked up, his expression imitating perfectly that of a twelve-year-old boy who, while still sullen, has been forced into following a course of action repugnant to him. "Oh, all right!" he said. "We'll fix Charley up so he won't kick." And under his breath, he added, "Ever again."

That night Kirwan worked late with his fine pointed drawing pen and the India ink. And when he had finished, the false dawn was just breaking; and showed, as he switched off his light, the addition he had made to his map in the southeastern corner of Thorvia. It was beautifully executed; a sluggish, somehow only-looking creature. Drawn to the scale of the map, it was very large—in fact, almost half the size of the swamp itself. It had a disgusting appearance, and was so clearly limned that one could almost see it move. Henry had a distinct talent. He slept, then, with the little smile that had become almost a fixture, on his face.

"King Kirwan," said Duke Shira, "I crave the help of some Draconian fighting-men."



Kirwan's eyebrows shot up. "So? Are not the Triyans content? Surely you do not expect trouble with your people?"

"No," said Shura. "The people are content, except for one thing—the woods are becoming increasingly full of khaiders, and you know why we must keep them down."

Kirwan nodded. Andrus of Ghuria, who had a tendency toward squeamishness, gulped a little, and looked unhappy, since the khaiders, those pale fawn-colored animals that looked something like weasels, had habits that were better not thought of.

"The only thing is," said Kirwan, slowly, "That I have reason to believe I will need all my fighting men shortly. Why not ask Duke Edric for some of his forces?"

All eyes turned toward Edric, who sat, fatly, in his chair, with a smug smile. "Sure," he said, pleasantly, "I'll let you have half of them. But I need more land, an' more influence. In fact, I think Kirwan ought to take over Thorvia, and I'll take Draco—and, of course, whatever goes with it."

The only one apparently unmoved in the middle of the resulting turmoil was Kirwan. "Quiet!" he said, loudly. And under the influence of his voice, they actually did quiet down.

"I have been expecting this," he said, unconcernedly. "But I am prepared for it. Edric—" he turned toward him suddenly. "Have you been down to the marsh lately?"

The fat Duke of Thorvia stirred uneasily. "What's that got to do with it?" he demanded. "Anyway, it's your headache now—Draco has no marsh," and he giggled. "And either I get Draco, and rule the whole bunch, or you know."

"Know what?" demanded Fiero truculently. But Kirwan held up his hand.

"He means he'll destroy Draconia by—well, exposing it to the light," he said, indifferently, almost with amusement at his own joke. "But—Edric, have you noticed that the dark purple waterlilies have all withered?"

A peculiar look came over Edric's face. "What of it?" he asked, shrilly, "What's that got to do with it?"

Kirwan smiled. "Why, I would suggest that after we disband tonight, you go down to the swamp and—maybe you'll find out why it charms. It might not be mineral springs, you know, and it would be interesting to find out what else it could be—wouldn't it?"

Edric's face looked ghastly. "I won't! You can't make me!" he cried. "I won't go near it!"

"You have to sleep," suggested Kirwan, still smiling. The others looked puzzled and frightened, but Edric looked dreadful. "I won't sleep!" he screamed. "I won't sleep!"

When they broke up, he was still muttering it.

At five o'clock in the morning, Kirwan sat up in bed. A look of anticipation, a listening look, was on his face, making it strangely unpleasant. His

attic room was directly above Charley's large, airy bedroom, and sounds traveled upwards fairly plainly. An anomalous sound was reaching his ears now a wet, squelchy, crawling sound. Suddenly, he heard a terrible cry.

As the sound of running feet, crying voices, and finally a dreadful scream from Auntie Martha, reached his ears, Kirwan turned over and went to sleep, smiling.



# *The Madness of Andelsprutz*

*by Lord Dunsany*

*Here is a very short a very slight sort of tale which may yet manage to hold either a very big ghost or a very potent allegory Lord Dunsany penned this sometime about the period of the First World War. Yet in what period of history, from the most ancient past up to very present, has not something of the spectre of Andelsprutz been perceptible to those with a sense of history For those, this story will prove a "thought piece" as well as a compelling fantasy.*



FIRST saw the city of Andelsprutz on an afternoon in spring. The day was full of sunshine as I came by the way of the fields, and all that morning I had said, "There will be sunlight on it when I see for the first time the beautiful conquered city whose fame has so often made for me lovely dreams." Suddenly I saw its fortifications lifting out of the fields, and behind them stood its beltries. I went in by a gate and saw its houses and streets, and a great disappointment came upon me. For there is an air about a city, and it has a way with it, whereby a man may recognize one from another at once. There are cities full of happiness and cities full of pleasure, and cities full of gloom. There are cities with their faces to heaven, and some with their faces to earth; some have a way of looking at the past and others look at the future; some notice you if you come among them, others glance at you, others let you go by. Some love the cities that are their neighbours, others are dear to the plains and to the heath; some cities are bare to the wind, others have purple cloaks and others brown cloaks, and some are clad in white. Some tell the old tale of their infancy, with others it is secret, some cities sing and some mutter, some are angry, and some have broken hearts, and each city has her way of greeting Time.

I had said "I will see Andelsprutz arrogant with her beauty," and I had said: "I will see her weeping over her conquest."

I had said "She will sing songs to me," and "she will be reticent," "she will be all robed," and "she will be bare but splendid."

But the windows of Andelsprutz in her houses looked vacantly over the plains like the eyes of a dead madman. At the hour her chimes sounded

unlovely and discordant, some of them were out of tune, and the bells of some were cracked, her roots were bald and without moss. At evening no pleasant rumour arose in her streets. When the lamps were lit in the houses no mystical flood of light stole out into the dusk, you merely saw that there were lighted lamps: Andelsprutz had no way with her and no air about her. When the night fell and the blinds were all drawn down, then I perceived what I had not thought in the daylight. I knew then that Andelsprutz was dead.

I saw a fair haired man who drank beer in a cafe, and I said to him:

'Why is the city of Andelsprutz quite dead and her soul gone hence?'

He answered: 'Cities do not have souls and there is never any life in bricks.'

And I said to him: "Sir, you have spoken truly."

And I asked the same question of another man, and he gave me the same answer, and I thanked him for his courtesy. And I saw a man of a more slender build, who had black hair, and channels in his cheeks for tears to run in, and I said to him:

"Why is Andelsprutz quite dead, and when did her soul go hence?"

And he answered: "Andelsprutz hoped too much. For thirty years would she stretch out her arms toward the land of Akla every night, to Mother Akla from whom she had been stolen. Every night she would be hoping and sighing, and stretching out her arms to Mother Akla. At midnight, once a year, on the anniversary of the terrible day, Akla would send spies to lay a wreath against the walls of Andelsprutz. She could do no more. And on this night, once in every year, I used to weep, for weeping was the mood of the city that nursed me. Every night while other cities slept did Andelsprutz sit brooding here and hoping, till thirty wreaths lay mouldering by her walls, and still the armies of Akla could not come.

"But after she had hoped so long, and on the night that faithful spies had brought the thirtieth wreath, Andelsprutz went suddenly mad. All the bells changed hideously in the belltowers, horses bolted in the streets, the dogs all howled, the stolid conquerors awoke and turned in their beds and slept again: and I saw the grey shadowy form of Andelsprutz rise up, decking her hair with the phantasms of cathedrals, and stride away from her city. And the great shadowy form that was the soul of Andelsprutz went away muttering to the mountains, and there I followed her—for had she not been my nurse? Yes, I went away alone into the mountains, and for three days, wrapped in a cloak, I slept in their misty solitudes. I had no food to eat, and to drink I had only the water of the mountain streams. By day no living thing was near to me, and I heard nothing but the noise of the wind, and the mountain streams roaring. But for three nights I heard all round me on the mountain the sounds of a great city: I saw the lights of tall cathedral windows flash momentarily on the peaks, and at times the glimmering lantern of some fortress patrol. And I saw the huge misty outline of the soul of Andelsprutz sitting decked with her ghostly cathedrals, speaking to herself,



with her eyes fixed before her in a mad stare telling of ancient wars. And her confused speech for all those nights upon the mountain was sometimes the voice of traffic, and then of church bells, and then of the bugles, but oftenest it was the voice of red war, and it was all incoherent, and she was quite mad.

"The third night it rained heavily all night long, but I stayed up there to watch the soul of my native city. And she still sat staring straight before her, raving, but her voice was gentler now, there were more chimes in it, and occasional song. Midnight passed and the rain still swept down on me, and still the solitudes of the mountain were full of the mutterings of the poor mad city. And the hours after midnight came, the cold hours wherein sick men die.

"Suddenly I was aware of great shapes moving in the rain, and heard the sound of voices that were not of my city nor yet of any that I ever knew. And presently I discerned, though faintly, the souls of a great concourse of cities, all bending over Andelsprutz and comforting her, and the ravines of the mountains roared that night with the voices of cities that had lain still for centuries. For there came the soul of Camelot that had so long ago forsaken Usk, and there was Lion, all girt with towers, still cursing the sweet face of ruinous Ifelen; I saw there Babylon and Persepolis, and the bearded face of bullike Nineveh, and Athens mourning her immortal gods.

"All these souls of cities that were dead spoke that night on the mountain to my city and soothed her, until at last she muttered of war no more, but she hid her face in her hands and for some while wept softly. At last she arose, and walking slowly and with bended head, and leaning upon Ilion, and Carthage, went mournfully eastwards, and the dust of her highways swirled behind her as she went, a ghostly dust that never turned to mud in all that drenching rain. And so the souls of the cities led her away, and gradually they disappeared from the mountain, and the ancient voices died away in the distance.

"Never since then have I seen my city alive; but once I met with a traveller who said that somewhere in the midst of a great desert are gathered together the souls of all dead cities. He said that he was lost once in a place where there was no water, and he heard their voices speaking all the night."

But I said "I was once without water in a desert and heard a city speaking to me but knew not whether it really spoke or not, for on that day I heard so many terrible things, and only some of them were true."

And the man with the black hair said, "I believe it to be true, though whither she went I know not. I only know that a shepherd found me in the morning faint with hunger and cold, and carried me down here; and when I came to Andelsprutz it was, as you have perceived it, dead."

## *The Painted Mirror*

*by Donald Wandrei*

*The only thing that holds us back from reprinting Donald Wandrei's "The Red Brain" is its ready availability in other anthologies. That classic story of the end of the universe and the brain that held the key to salvation was the start of Donald Wandrei's career as a writer. Since then he has continued successfully, first in pulp magazines, then in other fields including appearance in such periodicals as "E. quire." It is from that magazine that "The Painted Mirror" is taken. You may therefore expect—and correctly—to find here a different sort of horror story, a really outstanding tale of a magic mirror and the doom that was reflected therein.*

W

HEN Papa Khevi moved to a new city and began again in another old shop that he had bought, Nicholas knew before he saw them that three faded golden balls would hang outside the door. It had been so nearly as long as he could remember. A year here—sell and move. Two years there—sell and move on to another shop, a different town.

It had not been so when Mama Khevi lived. But of her, little Nicholas had only a vague dream that grew fainter each year. Then, long past, the three of them had dwelt in the place of strange, curious things, had always dwelt there; but after Mama Khevi died, a change came. Not many months later, Papa Khevi grew restless. He took the lad westward. And westward they went, from year to year, while Papa Khevi seemed ever more silent, with the odd, puzzled expression that troubled Nicholas showing more often in his eyes.

Like the others, this shop flaunted an array of objects that enthralled Nicholas for days—marvelous watches, magic cameras, guns, musical instruments, a rack of clothing, rings and bracelets, medals, paper currency and golden foreign coins, tarnished silver plate, oil-cracked paintings, an immense array of articles ranging from small treasure to junk.

But Nicholas saw it all as treasure-trove. Each piece told a tale of adventure among the inhabitants of far places. Nicholas learned every story merely by looking at the object. It was as simple as imagination. While Papa Khevi pattered around the shop, straightening the showcases, dusting shelves,



polishing a vase, or packing odds and ends for removal, Nicholas would take himself to a corner with his latest find. Nicholas had a knack of unobtrusively fading into the dark, shadowy spots where no one noticed him.

Not that there were many intruders. Papa Khevi was always gruff, or surly, with clients who came to buy. He put ridiculously high prices, which he refused to lower, upon even the most tawdry jewelry. He discouraged sales. Once in a while, despite his efforts, a purchaser met his asking price without quibble and walked away with the loot. Then Papa Khevi was cross the rest of the day. But he welcomed those who brought however little to pawn. He appraised the article, appraised the victim, estimated the need, and offered a trifle more.

Sometimes the police came, searching for stolen goods. Then Papa Khevi was all smiles. But at such times Nicholas stayed out of sight, because his father hated police, he never knew why, and after they had gone went around mumbling to himself.

It was on one of those occasions, when the measured tread of the police sounded through the opening door, that Nicholas discovered the mirror.

He scampered to the back of the store and the two tiny rooms that they led in. He usually remained there until the police left, but he thought that the heavy steps followed him. He dashed to the stairway, forgetting that Papa Khevi kept it locked, and that he had yet to find the door open. It opened readily this time. He was up the first flight before he remembered that it should have been locked. He listened, listened, his heart a flutter, but the heavy tread died out far away.

At the top of the second flight there was a single window. He peered through its grimy glass, and rubbed it hard with his hand. He cleared an oval spot. The soot outside kept him from seeing more than the outline of one- and two-story buildings, brick rows, beyond them the bluffs, and below them the river.

The gloomy light that filtered in showed him, when he turned, an attic crammed with bundles. Yellowed papers wrapped them and covered the barrels standing around. There were boxes filled to the brim. A whole new wonderland of stacked books, picture frames, trunks, hanging shrouded wraps, bureaus, tin cartons, and scattered unsorted heaps of stuff lay before him. He came across rolls of wallpaper, streaked cans of paint, brushes whose bristles had dried into a tightly cemented mass. A workbench was littered with dull, rusty tools.

Nicholas poked among these heaps of new treasure. It would take weeks to explore the attic thoroughly. It must have been accumulating its hoard from the day that the building was finished. The successive owners must have added to the collection without disturbing it. What few cobwebs he found sagged with the dust of years.

The roof, from its apex over the exact middle of the attic, slanted down to make an acute angle with the floor on all four sides. Uncovered beams

cry and fissured, formed the ribs of the roof. Resting on the floor, and tipped against these beams in one corner, stood a thick pile of screens and windows. At the very back of the pile, however, leaned an object of a different sort. It seemed to be a large, heavy pane of glass, a mirror.

Nicholas patiently dragged the screens and windows aside in order to get at the mirror. It must be a very special mirror or it would not have been so well concealed.

With the last of the frames removed, he felt a pang of disappointment.

A coat of black paint covered the entire face of the mirror.

Nicholas remembered that a can of black paint, partly used, and a brush caked with black paint lay in another part of the attic. Some previous occupant, then, had taken pains to render the mirror useless. Why? It would have been much simpler to shatter the glass. Why had someone avoided breaking the mirror, but at the same time destroyed its value?

Here was mystery, adventure, beckoning him. He went back to the workbench and picked out a chisel. The chisel had an almost blunt edge, but it served well enough for scraping the paint off the mirror.

The black coating cracked away in tiny flakes. At the end of an hour's hard work, he had cleaned an area somewhat larger than his two hands. He toiled for another hour before his arms grew tired.

A feeling of excitement had come over him, for this was, indeed, a magic mirror. He knew that already by the surface he had exposed, now as big around as a plate.

The mirror, as all mirrors should, reflected an image. But that image was not Nicholas, nor any object in the attic, nor any part of the attic! He could not make out more. He could not determine the true nature of the image. He had only a tantalizing glimpse of a portion of that imprisoned reflection.

Weary from his activity, and in a state of high anxiety, Nicholas pulled a couple of screens over to hide the mirror.

He tiptoed downstairs. When he heard Papa Khevi stomping around in the pawnshop, he felt better, but unrelieved. In the attic lay the road to the dark heart of mystery, or the shining eyes of fortune, if the door was not barred to him.

He tossed through a restless night, and worried in the hours of morning, his fancy gripped by the lure of the mirror. He put himself at the feet of Papa Khevi until he was brusquely told to go behave himself. Nicholas pattered from the display room in an agony of apprehension lest the attic door be locked.

The door swung open. Papa Khevi had evidently forgotten about it. With luck, providing Nicholas was cautious, he might be able to keep the door open for a long time. There was no reason for the attic to be used, now that Papa Khevi had looked it over or stored the bric-a-brac that he had removed from stock.



Nicholas climbed, his heart pounding so that his ears heard, and hurriedly slid the screens aside from the mirror.

His heart stopped pounding. The mirror reposed as he had left it. The plate-sized opening that he had made in the coat of paint showed the same baffling reflection as before. He seized the chisel and began to chip at the black film.

The layer grated loose with maddening slowness. It fractured in flakes too small to be measured. The particles dusted the floor at the base of the mirror, and sometimes whirled into his eyes with a sting. But he became more accustomed to the work, more intent on discovering what the magic mirror concealed. He scraped twice as long and cleaned three times as much surface as the day before, nearly a third of the mirror.

Still the scene hovered beyond definition. There were hints—no more than hints—of a bleak landscape; an entrance, hole, tunnel, cave, or hill of some sort rising stark from the plain, and the limbs of a fugitive.

A captive fleeing—from what? Away from a pursuer—a monster, an ogre? Toward refuge in the great spaces, the fringes yet hidden by the black paint—

His thoughts fled over the ways in which the full scene might manifest itself. He wondered what far place was mirrored in the glass. Since it was a magic mirror, obviously it wouldn't act like an ordinary mirror. Instead of reflecting what lay close to it, it reflected something at a great distance; and if at too great a distance, very likely Nicholas would never know or find the exact spot. Even after he stopped working, his mind remained nervously alert under the stimulus of the image, vibrant to its potentialities, quivering with the fever of anticipation.

When he opened the door for the third time, and climbed again to the attic, and found the mirror as he had left it, he hunted around until he brought to light an old file. With this he sharpened the chisel. His eagerness could tolerate no further delay in exposing the secret of the mirror.

The paint flaked off in the same tiny chips as before, but faster, much faster. The boundaries of the brooding landscape became wider, the dark cave stood out starkly upon the desert. Nicholas grew conscious of a glow, an aura of pallor that reflected into his eyes from the figure at the entrance to the cavern.

The mirror, stripped of the coating of black paint, disclosed a flat desert, a wilderness, unbroken by stone, dune, bush, stream or creature, a void that stretched endlessly in all directions. Upon that desolation stood only the cave, a horseshoe in shape, tunneling to the far distance. And from the cavern emerged a figure, dimly outlined save for its face which reflected the luminous pallor.

That diminutive figure seemed to be running out of the cave. The figure looked tiny, like a toy, a mere doll, because it was so remote in the depths of the mirror. Its eyes were closed. Its face showed terror, as though it fled blindly—from what? What footsteps following faster down that infinitely

long corridor caused the child, the girl, the doll to keep its eyes shut with fear?

Nicholas watched the image for hours, marveling at the illusion of three-dimensional depth in the mirror, the glass acted like a telescope seen through the wrong end, and multiplied by many times the distance to the object under focus.

He found himself unable to banish the picture from his mind. It stayed with him when he left. It preoccupied him during his waking hours. It persisted in his dreams, vividly, hauntingly alive.

Not without trepidation, he tugged at the screens upon his next ascent. The phantoms of sleep had lingered on, and deep within him quaked a bell that tolled unease.

But the marvelous mirror beckoned stronger, and Nicholas knew why when it lay exposed.

The eyes of the distant doll were wide open and fixed compellingly upon him!

A strange giddiness swept over him, like a wind that wafted all familiar things away. Knowledge smote him with its evil curse, knowledge that he had half guessed, half feared, and entirely denied—the knowledge that the mirror did not reflect a scene from some far corner of the world, but contained within itself a world of its own.

And the light, so pale, so unearthly, continued to glimmer from the elfin features of the doll, light originating in whatever sun or moon coursed the sky of that internal world above and beyond the frame of the mirror. Under the glow, the opened eyes of the figurine possessed a hypnotic brilliance, issued a silent message across all those intervening leagues.

A message—what message? Nicholas stared at the boundless, silent world—the vast plain, the cavern tunneling into distance beyond sight, the girl doll emerging and fleeing from whatever terror lurked behind her. The vestiges of that terror dwelt on her face, in the pallor of her cheeks, and her lips parted to gasp for breath. But hope, all but fled, had returned to her, fleeing still, as she opened her eyes and saw Nicholas.

Electrical tingles fired him, turned him hot and cold. He could only watch, unable to help, forced to wait, because of the barrier that separated their two worlds, a veil that neither of them could tear asunder. But there was a hope, if time would favor them. In all the days that he had labored, the distant doll had advanced only by a step, to open its eyes. The other world moved far more slowly than the world of Nicholas. She was safe a little while longer, because of the slow, almost imperceptible life of the land of the mirror.

She was a lovely thing, a golden toy, invested with perilous beauty. She had emerged fully from the cavern, Nicholas noted with a start. Turning, he saw that the shadows of evening had crept into the attic. The day had passed, and she had moved without his awareness. He wondered about the



trance into which he must have fallen, but not yet was he able to tear himself away.

He looked at the mirror again. In spite of the darkness that had fallen, the mirror stood out with ghostly luminance, and principally from the figure came that unpalpable glow. A tremor of excitement shook Nicholas. All fear had banished itself from the face of the golden doll, golden green, rather, under that unearthly light, an elin princess with body as enchanting and perfectly molded as the features that had first bewitched him. She was wholly free of the cavern. She was running toward him. She had forgotten the terror that lurked in the depths of the cave.

As he backed away slowly, a state of abnormal ecstasy and dream suspension enveloped him. So intensely vivid was the drama unfolding within the world of the mirror that he could not cast off its spell, nor did he wish to. He was unaware of descending the steps. His mind's eye had vision only for the golden green captive, teasing him, tantalizing him, keeping him aquiver, the sculptured beauty of the figure of the tiny fugitive.

Sleep abandoned Nicholas all night long. He listened for a voice, for a bell-like call in the attic afar, for the murmur of the crystal maiden. He lay half in a panic lest she escape during the night and become lost, leaving to him only the unseen terror that had not yet burrowed its way out of the tunnel.

The hectic tautness, combined with the state of suspension, outlasted night. The anxiety of waiting through the dawn hours fostered a flame within him, like an invisible sun, whose glare gave him no peace and permitted him no restful descent into slumber.

And when at last he began again the climb up the attic stairs, he tiptoed while his ears strained for a sound from above—the shatter of glass—the tinkle of a crystalline voice—fugitive footsteps—

But silence deepened curiously, until he fancied a roaring in his ears from the strain of attempting to hear. Was it the surge of blood in his veins, violent over the scuffle of his ascent?

He stood upon the attic floor, now, and all speculation ebbed away. A torrent of reflected radiance like moonlight upon quicksilver issued from the mirror. Far larger in size, looming to almost full grown human proportions, gigantic against the background of interminable desert, the golden-green captive seemed on the verge of stepping through the mirror. Her eyes summoned him, her arms were raised in supplication for escape.

Nicholas ran to the mirror, his hands outstretched. They touched hers, dissolved, blended. He hurtled headlong, pulled and catapulted and twisted fantastically. He was rigid, frozen, unable to press his way out of a solid sea of glass.

Far away, upon the other side of the mirror, beyond the crystal cliff that imprisoned him inside a timeless world, he saw his own rightful body, Nicholas, peering down at him, at this alien figure he had become, this

elfin form of the creature of the mirror. Behind him stretched the tunnel with its hidden terror.

Upon the face of that Nicholas far away spread a fiendish smile. The other Nicholas receded, only to return with a can of black paint and a brush. Stroke by stroke, that other Nicholas began to cover the mirror.

Nicholas tried in vain to make this alien figure move or shout or beat its way through the cliff of glass.

He was trapped. Night deepened around him, and became blackness. He was imprisoned forever in this golden-green figure. His despairing gaze watched that distant Nicholas, an unholy light of joy in its eyes, while it finished painting the entire surface of the mirror. He was captive in a soundless, boundless, motionless realm of black.

THE END



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